Dragon's Hero

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Summary: A young Hiccup is just now discovering his role as the village outcast on Berk. Distressed, he rushes into the woods where he finds a black baby dragon that he befriends. Little does Hiccup realize that this meeting unlocks a destiny unlike anything the world has ever known, one that will change him forever. Inspired by 'Dragon Rider' by xxsnowfallxx.

1. Chapter 1

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><p>Heroes - what is it that defines them? How do they choose what battles to fight and who to save, or is worth saving? What challenges must they face in order to find a hero's strength inside of them, and just what is that strength? These are all questions that one boy would eventually find the answers to, and with no lack of struggle in the process.<p>

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><p>It was a normal day like any other on the island of Berk, the sunlight peeking in through the clouds offering little warmth to counteract the cold winds blown forth from across the ocean. The chill was biting, but to the inhabitants, Vikings, it mattered little. Vikings were tough, resilient people that were more than used to hardship and could brave anything nature threw at them, as they had since their ancestors first sailed here three centuries ago. The village that stood now after seven generations of Viking legacy was a testament to the stubborn persistence they maintained in the face of their greatest threat, the dragon scourge.<p>

Vikings and dragons had been bitter enemies since what could be considered the dawn of time, their battles endlessly raging on in the

raids that raged in the dead of night and left their little tribe in tattered ruins. Houses that would take days to build would take more days to be built again after full nights of axe-swinging, fire blasts and wayward flying bodies from every direction, and animals would be abducted by the wicked beasts and meet their doom inside their vile stomachs. The cycle of kill or be killed was one without end, yet it was something that, for whatever reason, Vikings relished in, in fact it was something they based their whole lives in even if no one would care to admit it. A dragon's blood on their blade and its death on their hands were marks of everlasting glory that every Viking could be proud of and every Viking-to-be yearned for.

Yet there was one who many believed would never know this great feeling, one whose very existence stood to defy all tradition and bring eternal shame unto their little island. And unfortunately for everyone, it was the one person who absolutely could not afford to be the shame that he was. The chief's son, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, already a boy of seven years and yet he could easily be claimed the worst Viking Berk had ever seen in all the years it had somehow managed to remain standing.

Where most Vikings were built like houses with arms as big as tree trunks, Hiccup's build could only be compared to that of a splinter, and was about the size of one, too. Even the other children his age were already capable of lifting smaller weapons over their heads, whereas he was lucky if he could lift a bludgeon off the ground. People were already calling it quits on any kind of future the boy had, and already had their bags packed for the dreaded day when the little boy would be named chief. They would sooner sail to the edge of the world than let themselves be governed by a scrap of a boy, especially one that would sooner hunt for trolls than hunt dragons.

His father, Stoick the Vast, the current chieftain, could not allow his boy to go on as he was, so around two years ago, the boy was made the apprentice to the village blacksmith. The smith in question, his longtime friend Gobber, was highly reluctant of the idea at first. The truth is, Hiccup was not only weak but clumsy as well, and in a room full of sharp, heavy, dangerous weapons as well as a smoldering hot forge, well, the possibilities of what could go wrong were endless. Stoick, stubborn as he was, insisted that this was the only way to get those silly ideas of pretend flying and pursuits of fantasy creatures that he would spend hours doing out of his little head. That, and he figured spending the whole day pounding metal would be the best way to get some muscle on his bony little limbs. Two years later, though, no luck.

In fact, it was just a few months ago when the seeds of disaster really took root. Apparently Hiccup had been getting ideas behind his father's back. He had gotten his own little spot in the back of the forge, where he started drawing out crazy and outright stupid ideas for perplexing, hazardous machines unlike anything the Vikings had seen. The first one he built, an automatic bow launcher, ended up puncturing holes through five houses, and broke through barrels of their food supplies, making the fish stored inside easy pickings for the dragons during the raid.

Everyone in the village was absolutely furious with him, and some of the particularly nasty ones pelted him with stones and rotten fruit. The angry glares, shouting and slapping over the head hurt, but not

as much as those he got from his father. Hiccup swore he had never seen his father, the man he looked up to and admired so greatly, so ashamed in his entire life.

Hiccup was just watching the village from out through his window, looking at the rest of the village before him. Ever since the incident, he had been confined to the house and forbidden to leave except for working in the forge with Gobber. Especially during the raids that had come since â€“ Stoick would just lock him inside the house and leave him alone, threatening him with severe punishment should he set even one foot outside.

Not that Hiccup was all that thrilled about leaving at the beginning, the second he did he'd be shouted at and mocked and laughed at by the other kids his age. But now, looking out at the daily on-goings of the village, of the women pushing carts filled with apples, men hammering in wood planks to repair their houses and lifting barrels of mead, and boats sailing out with nets armed to bag more fish, he was starting to get bored.

What made him most bored was looking out at the kids playing in the village square, pretending to be dragon slayers. There was the twins Ruffnut and Tuffnut, who loved chaos and destruction so much, and Fishlegs, the timid dragon expert, pretending to be the dragons, and Snotlout, Hiccup's cousin and number-one bully, and Astrid, Hiccup's old friend, as the Vikings. Ruffnut and Tuffnut would take whatever excuse they could to break things, and they were taking their play a little too far, to be honest. They were smashing into walls, taking rocks and throwing them into houses, and tackling people like there was no tomorrow while pretending to roar and breathe fire. Fishlegs was trying the same, but he was so quiet his roars came out as little more than whimpers. Snotlout had no trouble pounding him into the ground, punching him over and over in the face screaming the same curses any Viking would to an actual dragon while laughing arrogantly as he did so. Fishlegs shook his legs and kept telling Snotlout to quit it and he was done playing, but the stronger child just kept on, saying there was no mercy for dragons.

Astrid on the other hand, was being much more serious, already having pulled both the twins into painful submission. If Hiccup didn't know better, he could swear someone forgot to tell her they were only playing a game. Nonetheless, everyone else just stayed out of the way, especially their families, who were gathered around watching. They actually encouraged this kind of rough play, laughing when the 'dragons' cried out in misery. They were always saying such roughhousing was the best way to prepare them for adulthood, when they would take their parents' place on the battlefield.

Even if only just to get beat up like he always did, Hiccup wanted to play with the other kids. It wasn't his favorite game, but he was willing to forego pleasure just to have some company. He didn't know why, but something about Vikings killing dragons always bothered him, even when his dad and Gobber told him it was the greatest achievement of a Viking's life and he would be doing the world a favor by ridding it of those beasts. More than any of that though, he wanted to play with Astrid, who had been giving him the cold shoulder and ignoring him for the longest time.

"Daddy, can't I go play outside with the other kids?" Hiccup asked back to his father, who was back over at the table reading over

documents stating village damage and inventories. The man appeared to have a headache the size of the mountain on the island if the irritated look on his face and the annoyed gaze he had were any clue. He had an ice block to his head, using the cold temperatures to soothe the pain. The drops of water were already falling down his face from the heat of his body to the side.

"And make a bigger mess of things?" His father angrily growled. "You'll stay put right there until I say so and not a moment sooner, am I understood, boy?" Hiccup's father, between his greater size than any other Viking on the island and his fiery red beard, had to be the most intimidating man in the world. Hiccup himself couldn't help but flinch at the tone his father used, his father had always soundedâ€¦ drained before, now he seemed completely annoyed.

"But I just wanted to help you guys out." He said, sinking down into his chair by the window.

"Help?" Stoick exclaimed, narrowing his eyes while just barely glancing. "You call what you did 'help'? Do you know what your foolish little shenanigans cost us, Hiccup?"

"I said I was sorryâ€¦ like a hundred-million times, to everybody." Hiccup whispered.

"'Sorry' doesn't fix all those people's homes," Stoick shot back as he rose up from his seat and glared at the boy. "'Sorry' doesn't get back all the food you let those vile creatures take that took our men days to collect. 'Sorry' doesn't make up for the fact that you made a mess of everything!" He all but shouted right into his face.

Hiccup was on the verge of crying by now, his father never yelled at him like that before. These days, it seemed like his father hated him, but Hiccup couldn't understand how it could be because of just one mistake. Plenty of people made them, even his father, and he was just a child, but when he messed up, people shouted and screamed. To say the least, he was terrified that his father, the man who popped a dragon's head right off its body when he was a child, the man who could shatter boulders with his head alone, was so harshly judging him. Especially when the only reason he did it was to help and make this very same man proud.

Hiccup tried to say something, but his breath halted while any possible answer died in his mind the second he looked back into his father's cold stare. He continued to back away slowly, hoping he could just dissolve into the wall. All he could do was look away and hope his father wouldn't see the little stray, frightened tears that threatened to spill. Vikings never cried, he always said.

Stoick failed to notice even his son's fear, instead only scoffing while he returned to his work. "I have more important thing to do than to clean up after you, Hiccup. If you're ever going to be chief of this village, you're gonna have to learn to take some responsibility for your actions."

Hiccup frowned and turned away to look out the window again, his father's hypocritical statement stuck in the recesses of his mind. How was he supposed to take responsibility when he was constantly locked up in the house not allowed to even set foot outside? He wondered for a moment if his father wanted to keep him inside just so

he wouldn't have to deal with him when he went out on his rounds. His throat seized and his fingers clenched at the thought while he tried to reassure himself. His dad wouldn't do something like that, right?

He felt it was a bad idea, but he had to ask anyway. "Well, I can go outâ€¦ soon right?" His voice came out as a small whisper, trembling somewhat, afraid to rouse the anger his father had already built up. It seemed he was worried for nothing though, or rather he couldn't tell, since his father ignored him and just continued to review the papers.

"Well, don' yu two look cozy?" Came a voice from the front of the house.

Stoick lifted his head while Hiccup's turned around for them both to see a man almost as large as Stoick standing through the open doorway. He had a dirty blond mustache, soot covered rags for clothes, and a stone tooth in his mouth. What would grab anyone's attention if they were to meet this man for the first time, though, was the arm and leg of his that had both been replaced by makeshift prosthetics. The leg was nothing more than a wooden peg while a rusty but still sturdy hammer was in place of his hand. He had lost them both in the wars with the dragons some time ago in his youth, and they had since been replaced while he was stuck in the forge. But slightly disabled as he was, it didn't make him any less of a fighter, or any less cheerful of a man. He supplied a happy grin looking at both father and soon with both his hammer and remaining hand at his hips.

"Hi, Gobber!" Hiccup said with as much happiness as he could muster given the scolding he received earlier. Stoick only grunted to acknowledge his presence.

"Don' get too excited, it's just your favorite blacksmith." Gobber mumbled while rolling his eyes. He went over to see the boy who was just now getting out of his seat and slowly jogging over to him. "An' how's ma favorite apprentice?"

"I'm fine, Gobber." Hiccup said a little sadly. Usually, it would be up to the parent to pick up on emotions like these, but in this case, Stoick remained true to his name and continued to read in silence. Gobber, however, was a bit more sensitive to the boy now that he had gotten some time with him in the forge and they could work on weapons together. He had to admit, the boy had a sharp mind and keen attention to detail for his age; he still had a ways to go and could still hardly carry a single weapon, but the swords he polished did come out with a nice shine to them.

"All right, what's wrong, ya little fishbone?" Gobber asked with a cocked eyebrow.

Hiccup's smile vanished instantly and he looked down to the ground with downcast eyes. "Dad says I can't go outside. He doesn't want me to cause trouble for anyone."

Instantly, Gobber's face turned serious when he turned his look to Stoick; the man in question just continued to sit there as if he was the only one in the house, just reading his papers with more focus than though possible, even tracing the strokes of the charcoal used

for the writing. Gobber just stood there waiting for a response from the chief, but all he was met with was silence. Gobber had even tried clearing his throat for a response, but Stoick just grunted again. A typical Viking conversation, Gobber thought, a few noises saying it all.

"All right, Hiccup, you jest head on over to tha forge and sweep the place up. Let me have a little talk with chief bossypants over here." Gobber said while scooting Hiccup through the door with a light push to the boy's small back with his hammer.

"But-" Hiccup turned back to complain.

"Ah, the only butt you should be worried abou' is yar own if you don't scooch on over and do yer job. Trust me, I can handle this stubborn old muttonhead." Gobber said with a wink.

Hiccup's smile returned in a form almost as small as him. "Okay, Gobber. Don't worry, I'll make the place super clean by the time you get there." And with that the little boy rushed off to the forge as fast as his spindly legs could carry him.

"It better be, or else you'll be in some deep yak dung by the time I get there!" Gobber called back cheerfully. He watched Hiccup go down the steps of the small hill that lead up to the chief's house down to the village square. Before long, the boy vanished into the multitude of houses and villagers, gone from Gobber's sight. As soon as he was gone, Gobber turned back to Stoick with an irritated look, while the chief was still busy reading papers.

"All right, he's gone. You can turn yer ears on again." He deadpanned. Stoick finally looked up from the paper with a surprised expression, but quickly turned into one of confusion. Apparently, the whole 'shouting at Hiccup' thing completely passed over his head. Still, Gobber continued to give him an unimpressed look.

"What!?" Stoick asked finally.

"Oh, nuttin." Gobber replied nonchalantly folding his arms. "I'm jest wondering if yuv already got a shelf picked out for the boy, or maybe a cage. Cages are the in-season thing right now, ya know."

"What are you talking about?" Stoick tiredly asked.

"I'm talking about how you're apparently planning on making Hiccup a prisoner in his own house. At this point, all ya need to do is dip him in molten steel and make an ornament outta 'im." Gobber said.

"Don't give me tha' attitude. You saw what that infernal contraption of his did, we're lucky we managed to even hold on to one winter's worth of food!" Stoick growled getting up. "And gods know what else he might have ruined if I didn't smash that thing to pieces." Stoick still remembered the end of it clearly, how he had to repeatedly crush the thing with his hammer until barely anything was left. Hiccup, too young and inexperienced to thoroughly plan out every part of the invention, overlooked a calibration issue with the lever that controlled the firing rate when he had gotten to actually constructing it. This caused the machine to launch arrows without any kind of control. Stoick was able to destroy it, but in the process he

and the rest of the village had completely ignored the still-raiding dragons. Hiccup's antics had allowed them to get away with their food and a number of their sheep, yaks, and chickens; some actually thought he had deliberately done their long-time enemies a favor.

"Right, well, it's smashed." Gobber said with a huff from his large nostrils. His eyes looked slightly saddened at the moment, remembering Hiccup's face when his machine met the heavy end of Stoick's hammer. He had been so disappointed to see his hard work destroyed in an instant, especially when he was counting on it so much, and even despite all the problems it caused. "Now how long 'till you and every other whiny baby around here sucks it up and lets it go?"

"It was an act of reckless abandon, complete disregard for his people and utter lunacy in general!" Stoick growled again. "Someone could have gotten hurt or killed!"

Gobber just gave a dull look while his limbs hung to the side. His words summed up his expression perfectly. "Really? We fight dragons for a livin', and now you're worried about somethin' like that? What happened to 'we're Vikings, it's an occupational hazard?'" He gave his best impression of Stoick at that quote. It seemed to be Stoick's go-to phrase whenever he took the men to go on their rather periodic hunts for the dragons' nest, the home of the dragons. Really, he used it for any dangerous activity the Vikings did in general.

"I'll have you know that counts as insulting yur chief, I can have you thrown in a dungeon for that." Stoick said unimpressed with his arms crossed.

"Oh, well, wouldn't want that." Gobber said in a false-worried tone, holding up his hand and hammer in mock fear and rolling his eyes as high up to the ceiling as they could go. "Plenty of winters since those rat holes got a good scrubbin'â€¦"

"Will you just get to the point!?" Stoick asked exasperated. "I've got more important matters ta deal with then my son's littleâ€¦ 'hiccups!'" The word just came to him to describe the matter, and yet that one word summed it up perfectly in his mind. Such an act was something that Hiccup and only Hiccup, with his crazy ideas and overall difference, could have ever conceived.

"That right there, tha's ma point." Gobber said pointing at Stoick with his hammer hand. "It was months ago! The fishing crews have already gotten the stores fill'd up again and the cycle o' life continues over a' the pens. Exac'ly how long are yu gonna keep him here, undar lock and key?" Gobber asked.

"Till he starts acting like a real Viking!" Stoick shouted, slamming his fist on the table for emphasis.

"An' how is he sapposed ta do tha if you don' let him make mistakes and learn from them?" Gobber pointed out.

"Because when that boy makes mistakes, EVERYONE suffers for it!" Stoick said, pacing around the table and past the fireplace alight with warm bright flames until he was directly in front of Gobber. The light behind him only reaching his large backside left his face

covered in shadow, giving the man an impossibly more intimidating look. "I give him room to do so, and he'll end up burning this village to the ground long before the devils get the chance! You think I haven't seen that little room of his in the back of the forge? I'm perfectly aware this is only the beginning!"

"Now, hold on-"

"No, Gobber. I put him in that forge so he could bulk up and get past thisâ€¦ awkward stage of his. I'm countin' on you," he jabbed his finger straight into Gobber's chest, the smith barely moving an inch despite his strength, "to make sure of it. I mean it. No. More. Mistakes." Stoick said, pushing and jabbing his finger with every last word while he fixed his glare on Gobber with all the intensity of a harsh blizzard's cold.

The room was silent for a moment, save for the crackling of the fire and the wind blowing through the thick pine trees of the forest outside. The two Vikings just kept their gazes upon each other with eyes narrowed and tempers at the very least flared. The two had always had a bumpy road in terms of their friendship, and like any Vikings they resolved them with everything from verbal arguments to brutal spars in the Kill Ring. It had always been in good nature though, and the two always found peace in the end, either coming to a mutual understanding or just dropping the subject altogether.

In the years following Stoick's ascension to chief, they had gotten much better at avoiding arguments altogether, thanks to his improved skills in diplomacy and tact. Hiccup, though, was a constantly ongoing issue that the two men could find little common ground on, were always at odds on. They both wanted what was best for the boy; at least that was what it seemed on the surface.

But sometimes Gobber had to wonder if Stoick was just trying to find ways to avoid the boy. It certainly didn't help that he was born the runt of the litter and was given the traditionally appropriate name for it. Perhaps Stoick, who once envisioned his child at the time of his birth growing up to be the greatest of all Vikings, was just trying to escape his shattered hopes and dreams for the future.

"No more mistakesâ€¦" Gobber echoed backing off from Stoick. "You don't think tha's a little much to ask of a seven year old boy?"

"You're saying as a chief I judge him too harshly?" Stoick asked with a slightly cocked eyebrow. Gobber could see the veins running on his forehead, throbbing with each second. Apparently he was getting a little tired of his roundabout play. Good, Gobber was tired of playing this game just biding his time for Stoick to catch on to the rules.

"As a chief, maybe not. As a _father_..." Gobber emphasized the word with as much volume as he could, afterwards only giving a simple shrug. Gobber could swear nine out of ten times in the day, Stoick flat out forgot he was Hiccup's father and Hiccup was his son. The fatherly side of Stoick barely even saw the light of day, he figured. "But fine, I'll see wha I can do." With that, he turned away from Stoick and hobbled over slowly to the door, his peg leg leaving him with his usual limp. Just before he made it out, his good hand held onto the doorway and he turned back slightly to look at

Stoick.

"Jest a bit o' advice, old friend." Gobber began, catching Stoick's attention just as he was about to return to his seat. "Expect perfection, and there's little doubt you'll end up disappointed." And he left, shutting the door behind him, leaving Stoick alone in the house with only his thoughts and Gobber's words.

Stoick just growled angrily again and shut the window before returning to his seat, setting the ice block that had already melted down to two thirds of its original size back upon his head. He grabbed the papers in his hand once again and continued to read. "Expect perfectionâ€¦ what I expect is a worthwhile son." He muttered.

He never would have guessed that the son in question was just underneath the now closed window, having heard him word for word.

* * *

><p>Hiccup jogged through the village making his way to the forge at an even pace, just trying to take in every part of the outdoors that he had missed as much as possible. The warm sunlight as it seemed through the heavy clouds surrounding the island, the sound of birds chirping and the ocean waves crashing against the rocky shores. The smells of forest pine, freshly cut fruit, and smoked salmon and Icelandic cod that mixed together in a strangely pleasing aroma. He couldn't remember how long it had been since he had experienced any of these things. To the impatient child it seemed as if it had been an eternity since he had set foot on both the soft grass and the rough dirt of the outside world.<p>

Focusing back into reality, he had caught wind of all the villagers whose eyes were fixed solely on him, from the moment he came into view to the moment he passed them by. Each and every one, man and woman, young and old, had their eyes set in a harsh and furious glare that followed him every step of the way.

Hiccup cringed with each new glare he caught, turning his head left and right to see someone new silently staring daggers at him, each new one causing him to shrink down even more. He barely even registered how his walking had started to slow to the point where he was just sluggishly walking, each step only propelling him an inch or two forward.

He had just made it to the forge, arms huddled around himself in an attempt to make him smaller than he already was. Deep down, he was really hoping he could just disappear, it was a new and foreign feeling to him at that moment, that feeling of being surrounded by giants while he was as small as a speck of dust. It went against everything his father had told him when he was younger, to hold his head up high and be proud in the face of anything. He didn't feel brave or proud then, just the opposite really â€“ he felt likeâ€¦ he didn't belong.

Just as he made it to the forge, he felt something hard hit him against his head, small but hard. Turning around while rubbing his head to soothe the sore spot he noticed it was a mid-sized pebble. He lifted his head up to see Snotlout tossing more pebbles in his hand with a smug look on his face. Alongside him were the twins snickering

in the background, Fishlegs cowering behind Snotlout, and Astrid looking away with her arms crossed. They were all in their normal attire, just normal, beat-up, adequately sewn brown, gray, and blue tunics for each of them.

Hiccup just looked at them before a few moments before Snotlout instantly threw another rock at him, this one hitting him right in between the eyes. Hiccup yelped in pain and rubbed the sore spot before glaring back at the slightly older boy.

"What was that for?" Hiccup angrily asked.

Snotlout's smirk just grew at that moment until it reached both sides of his face. "Just wanted to get your attention." And he chucked another pebble at him, this one smacking him right in the forehead and leaving a bright red mark. Again, he yelped in pain and looked back again in anger.

"Well, I'm looking right at you, so quit throwing rocks at me!" Hiccup complained.

"'Quit throwing rocks at me!'" The twins both mocked in voices as nasally and infantile as they could possibly make them. Hiccup was as small, as whiny, and as weak as a baby compared to everyone else, even kids younger than him, so no better voice suited him. The twins just cackled and started babbling gibberish in the same voice with just the same disrespectful tone, with the occasional phrase along the lines of "I stubbed my toe, wah, wah," and "somebody change my diaper, I made a oopsie." Whatever disrespectful, childish mock complaint came into their heads came out of their mouths just as quickly. Soon the two were a jumbled mess on the ground, just continuing to cackle, even Snotlout joining in before long.

"You wanna do something about it? Just try, 'Useless!'" Snotlout called out, crossing his arms and standing tall like he was the greatest Viking alive.

Hiccup's look of anger quickly melted into one of confusion at Snotlout's insult. He wasn't too sure, but he really didn't like the sound of it, even backing away a few steps to show such. "U-Useless? What do you mean?"

"Try and pay attention here, runt, it's your new official title!" He explained with cruel excitement. "I mean, it really fits: you weren't born right, you can't lift any weapons, you made a total mess of the village with your doohickey. Really, you can't do anything right!" He just looked at his nails while emptily pointing out the list as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. Around Berk, though, it might as well have been.

Every Viking, one they had completed a specific feat of greatness or daring, was awarded with their own title or moniker. This would be the name that warriors from around the world would come to know them as, the name they would go down in history with once their times had come. The title would usually reflect the deed the Viking had done in one way or another.

For example, Hiccup's father, Stoick the Vast, received his name because of his great strength and stature, as well as his influence as chief. Their first researcher in the field of dragons was named

Bork the Bold because he had the courage to do what no one else did and approach each and every dragon to study them and record them for future generations to know the most effective way to kill them. As for Gobber, well he was called Gobber the Belch, but no one really knew why; at least, Hiccup didn't, Gobber never really had a problem with burping as far as he knew. Still, Hiccup had imagined his own title to be unique, special, something that commanded respect from others around him, maybe something related to his creativeness.

But Hiccup the 'Useless'? No, absolutely not, Hiccup didn't want to go down in the annals of Viking history with a title like that. He didn't want future generations of Vikings reading about him and laughing as these children were now, mocking him for being incapable or clumsy. He wouldn't be able to even show his face in public with a title like that.

"Aww, is widdle Hiccup gonna cwy?" Snotlout asked looking down to see how openly disturbed Hiccup was at the dawning of his new title. "I get it, you feel totally honored that I came up with it for you. Like I said, it suits you perfectlyâ€¦" He sneered.

"No, it doesn't!" Hiccup cried out in fury, his eyes slightly red and an embarrassed shade of light crimson on his cheeks. "Take it back! I don't wanna be Hiccup the Useless!"

"Oooh, he looks mad!" Tuffnut called out, his tiny blonde braids bouncing with him as he hopped up and down. "Check it out, he's as red as a Nightmare!"

"Eew, don't say that!" His sister Ruffnut called, pushing Tuffnut to the ground. "That's like an insult to Nightmares, heh-heh!" She didn't get to say much more before Tuffnut tackled her down to the ground and they had gotten into one of their iconic fights.

"Are you really complaining? After I so generously gave you your own title?" Snotlout asked with fake hurt in his voice, holding a hand out to his chest and feigning looking as hurt as possible. Before long his expression changed to one of irritation. "You got some nerve, turning down a gift from your cousin like thatâ€¦" Hiccup winced at that: in his ongoing torment at Snotlout's hands, he had actually forgotten that they were indeed related. Their fathers were brothers to one another, after all. But by all rights, Snotlout certainly didn't act like family: family doesn't hurt you or tease you, Hiccup knew that much.

Suddenly Snotlout started pounding his fist into his right hand and stalking over to Hiccup, who backed up a few more steps. The look on the older cousin's face showed he was practically in a position to kill. Hiccup's eyes darted around like flies, looking for some possible means of escape, but there was no possible way without running into one of the other kids. Before long, Snotlout had caught him and grabbed him by the collar of his green tunic, lifting him off the ground by a couple of inches.

"You know, honestly, I'm embarrassed to be related to you." Snotlout started. "Berk's a place for _real_ Vikings, strong, tough guys like me; weaklings like you oughta just be tossed into the ocean to be shark bait."

Fishlegs, who had remained quiet the whole time for fear of getting

beaten up by the arrogant Snotlout or the psychotic twins, finally perked up. He let out a sharp gasp and held his hands to his mouth, looking on in horror. "Wait, Snotlout, you're not really gonnaâ€¦"

"Shut up, Fishlegs!" Snotlout cried out, barely even paying attention to Hiccup desperately trying to worm his way out of his grip with all his strength with both his arms wrapped around his hand. To Snotlout he was barely even a threat â€“ the kid couldn't even fight his way out of a wet potato sack. "Of course I'm not gonna, as much as it disappoints me. I just wanna teach this little runt about being grateful." Snotlout flexed his knuckles, ready to deliver a good punch. Hiccup could tell as much by the sound of his knuckles cracking underneath his flabby skin.

At that point, Hiccup, turned to the other child who had remained quiet the whole time, Astrid. The girl who always stood by her side when they were little. The girl who had already shown the proper attitude and the willingness to learn, who said she was going to be the best shield-maiden Berk had ever seen.

The girl in question was just looking at him out of her peripheral vision, looking for all the world uninterested even at the sight of him about to be hurt. For the life of him Hiccup could not understand why she didn't help him immediately. Why wasn't anyone, now that he thought about it? They were out in the open where everyone could see, where an adult could easily stop this before it got too far. But no one did anything, they just went on their daily business just ignoring him; some were looking, but it almost seemed as if they were waiting for him to be hurt. To be taught 'a lesson,' as Snotlout put it.

Hiccup needed someone, anyone to help him, and he figured Astrid was his best bet. They were childhood friends, and if she still respected that, she would step in. "A-Astrid." He whimpered. "Helpâ€¦"

Snotlout just cackled in arrogance. "Seriously, you need a girl to fight for you!? You can't show some muscle and do it yourself?" He asked then quickly returned to his traditional sneer. "Oh, that's right, you can't. Well then, you better get ready for a hard lesson in mannersâ€¦"

Hiccup just shut his eyes as tightly as he could while Snotlout braced his fist, waiting for the inevitable blow that would leave him with a black eye or a broken nose. As much as he hated to admit it, Snotlout had a point: unless you had muscles, you couldn't do anything on the island of Berk. Physical strength was a common asset and played such a large role in everyday life, people who didn't have it were practically outsiders in their own tribe. Maybe Snotlout was right when he said that he should be known as Hiccup the Useless, Hiccup thought, as he grit his teeth and steeled himself as much as he couldâ€¦

â€¦But the punch never came, no force, no pain, no bruise, nothing. Daring to peek open an eye, Hiccup saw that Snotlout's fist had been stopped just centimeters away from his face. Another hand had caught his just in time, and upon opening his eyes further, Hiccup could see his savior in full.

Sometime in between Snotlout's gearing up and the eventual moment of impact, Astrid had run up and caught him. Her hand was wrapped around his wrist and she was glaring at him coldly, which seemed to have an effect on the young bully based on the gleam of fear in his eyes.

Snotlout just stared dumbly at her while trying to get his hand free. "What do you think you're doing?" He asked in an irritated voice.

"Stupid, you wanna get in trouble with the chief?" Astrid replied.

"Pppth!" He spat before laughing again. "Yeah, right; any second now, my uncle's gonna come running down the hill and save his little runt of a son. Get real! He doesn't care about him: I mess with Useless here all the time and he never shows up." He turned back to Hiccup and slammed him against the wall again. "Face it, your dad thinks you're nothing but trouble, a big joke, I could toss you off the cliff like I said and he wouldn't even notice."

Hiccup was completely horrified by that statement, too scared and upset to really distinguish right from wrong at that very moment. Could it be true? Could his father think so lowly of him that he'd just ignore him if his life was in some manner of great peril? No, his father loved him, all parents loved their children. He could be a good Viking and his father could be proud of him, and yet the more he tried to tell himself that, the less he found himself able to believe it.

Suddenly, Snotlout's arm was twisted back into a painful position once Astrid tightened her own grip. The larger boy yelped in pain as his arm was pulled back and he let go of Hiccup, dropping the little boy to the ground. Hiccup only curled up and watched while tears began to prick his cousin's eyes while Astrid dragged him back.

"Runt or not, he's the chief's son; he finds out about this, he won't be happy." Astrid reprimanded. "Besides, you said you wanted to be a good warrior like your father, right? If that's the case, try putting more time into practicing and less into bullying and bragging!" She then tossed him back to his original spot, next to the twins, who were snickering once again about how he had gotten shown up by a girl. Even if it was Astrid.

Snotlout just scowled at her while rubbing his arm to ease the throbbing. "Fine, but this isn't over, Useless!" He threatened before running off, with the twins and Fishlegs hot on his tail. Hiccup just watched them run away in silence, too scared to even breathe or think. Before long he snapped out of his stupor and looked up at Astrid, still there with her back turned to him. Hiccup's mind had allowed a moment of confusion to enter in next to the fear that was still present. Why wasn't she looking at him anymore? She had never acted this way before? What changed?

Still, he felt he had to say something, if only to ease the still-present tension. "U-Um, thanks for-"

But Astrid cut him off with a sharp huff, barely turning around to narrow her eyes at him. "He was right about one thing, I guess.

You're nothing but trouble." Hiccup's mouth gaped as he watched her turn back around and jog off into the village.

Hiccup just swallowed the lump in his throat as he picked himself up after spending several minutes just curled up there, in that one spot. He took one look at the village, all the people just continuing to pretend nothing had happened, no bullies had come to push him down and try to make him cry. Because he knew now that they all felt the same way as Snotlout: because he tried to help and failed, people thought of him as a nuisance now. His chest tightened and he froze where he stood, depressed, scared, surrounded by people and yet all alone.

Too saddened to even remember what he had come down to do, Hiccup just decided to head home again. Maybe his father was right, maybe he should just stay in the house for the rest of his life, where he couldn't bother anyone and people wouldn't have to deal with his messes. Maybe forever, but hopefully until things blew over and everyone finally forgot about his mistake.

He slowly walked back the same path through the village, keeping his eyes fixated on the ground, not bothering to make eye contact with anyone else. The last thing he needed was anyone else reminding him of his new 'title.' He had managed to stay out of everyone's way by the time he trudged back up the steps to the front door of his house and reached the front door.

But just as he was about to open it, he heard voices from the inside, rough voices like boots crunching on gravel with thick accents. He realized that Gobber must still be in the house and was currently talking with his father. Hearing nothing but muffled snippets of the conversation, Hiccup quickly ran to the side of the house and ducked under the window, keeping his ears sharp.

"I put him in that forge so he could bulk up and get past thisâ€¦ awkward stage of his. I'm countin' on _you_ to make sure of it. I mean it. No. More. Mistakes." That sounded like his father, just as angry and intimidating as when Hiccup left.

"No more mistakesâ€¦ You don't think tha's a little much to ask of a seven year old boy?" This time, it was Gobber.

"You're saying as a chief I judge him too harshly?"

"As a chief, maybe not. As a _father_... But fine, I'll see wha I can do." Hiccup could hear Gobber's peg leg tap against the wooden boards on the floor and the door open, signaling he was just about ready to leave. Then, without warning, the tapping stopped. "Jest a bit o' advice, old friend. Expect perfection, and there's little doubt you'll end up disappointed." Hiccup was startled more by Gobber's words than the door quickly slamming shut at that moment. Was that what his father wanted from him, perfection, no mistakes, to be completely flawless? Hiccup wasn't sure if he could be that.

He heard softer footsteps then, what he guessed was his father returning to his seat. "Expect perfectionâ€¦ what I expect is a worthwhile son."

That was it then. The villagers, the kids, even his father â€“ they all hated him. To his own father, Hiccup wasn't just someone who made

mistakes, he was a mistake. He was no Viking, he didn't belong here at all with true warriors; he was an outcast, a freak, a nothing. He suddenly felt like he couldn't breathe at all, his heart just been shattered into a thousand pieces, he didn't know what to think or believe. All he really knew was that he had to get away. He couldn't stay in the village, not when people despised him so, just because of one mishap. Or who really knew? Maybe they had always hated him and it just took that one night filled with destruction and mishaps to give them a proper excuse for it.

Hiccup just shut his eyes to block the tears and chose a random direction to run off in. He didn't realize that he was indeed heading far outside of the village, into the woods beyond.

2. Chapter 2

Wow, I just cannot believe this. 31 followers to this story already? I cannot believe how quickly this has caught fire after only one chapter; I can only imagine how this is gonna turn out once we get to the good stuff.

Sorry if it seems this doesn't update as fast as the rewrite I'm working on. The truth is, I already have a bunch of those chapters all ready to go and upload, which is why I post them so fast. This story is pretty much my first Httyd fanfic that I'm doing on my own, and I'm taking my time working on an overall plotline while at the same time writing these individual chapters as I go along. I try to cap them off at about 5000 words per chapter, so as not to overwhelm readers with so much. Again, my first fanfic, so try and cut me a bit of slack.

I hope you guys enjoy this one, because I'm not sure how I feel about it. It was a real head-scratcher trying to work out these conversations.

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* * *

><p>Hiccup continued to jog forward into the dense forest ahead him, passing through the scores of pine trees that from his perspective seem to touch the sky. In every direction the trees spread out, every possible turn led through more and more of them. Though upset, he still managed to navigate the path through, passing shrubs, hopping off the tops of rocks jutting from the ground and small crevices where smaller animals hid. The forest grew deeper and deeper as he went on, until the sky could barely even be seen past the needles on each of the individual trees' highest branches.<p>

Hiccup had been warned many times not to go into the forest unless he had an adult with him, as all the children were. He was just warned multiple times due to his short attention span, even though this was technically his first time going in so deeply. The woods were supposed to be home to several kinds of dangerous animals, such as wild boars or wolves. Some Vikings even said that they had spotted a dragon or two roaming around probably hunting for food; those dragons were always promptly killed though before they could go any further. Still, Hiccup couldn't help but be wary and wonder how many more were inside.

Now, though, he didn't really care about any potential dangers or anything of the like. He just wanted to be by himself, away from everybody else, who suddenly hated him after one mistake.

Hiccup kept his eyes forward, locked on the path ahead of him, and failed to notice the large rock sticking out of the ground. His foot caught on it and he tripped down with a hard slam to the ground. His green tunic was covered in dirt stains and he could feel a slight sprain in his ankle. He even felt a small stink coming from somewhere around his knee, he had guessed that it had been skinned in the fall somehow. He picked himself up and just sat there in silence for a few moments, looking down at his small lap.

Everything Snotlout said about being useless and a liability just kept spiraling in his mind in a whirlpool of derogatory thoughts. The insults just replayed themselves over and over again, making both his head and his heart hurt along with the rest of his body. Such insults only drove home the fact that he was the polar opposite of his father it seemed, someone who commanded respect and admiration from all around him with words alone. A man who was nearly as tall as a mountain and more ferocious than any storm that hit the island of Berk, who could stare into the eyes of devils with nary a flinch and fight until his last breath. He wanted to be someone like that, he wanted to be the perfect Viking that his father wanted more than anything else in the world.

Now that he thought about it, he was born at the same time the other kids were, so he should have grown up like them. They were all around the same age, even if he was a few weeks behind Snotlout or the twins. Surely he should have, at that point, been just as healthy as them.

Yet here he was, with arms as limp as weeds and a chest so small he could easily pass for a stick. It was the way he was born, and it was something that neither he, nor anyone else could change. He had tried to bulk up in the past, stuffing himself with food until he was ready to burst and he puked into the wee hours in the outhouse by their home. But for all his efforts, his miniscule frame remained unchanged and he was just barely able to lift the weapons lying on the forge floor off the ground.

Hiccup huddled up to himself, hugging his knees and scrunching up his back, letting himself ignore the reality of his situation and ponder as if it was possible_. If I was strong, will daddy and everyone else be happy? If I was the same as them, will they like me?'_

He suddenly heard a rustling sound coming from somewhere nearby, and he picked his head up to look. There was nothing in front of him, at first glance it seemed he was still by himself in the woods. He heard the sound again, and he pinpointed it to a nearby bush that was shaking somewhat.

Perhaps it was a small animal, like a squirrel or a rabbit, Hiccup guessed, but the rustling seemed to be too loud and too frequent for either of them. It was most likely a baby boar or wolf cub, and just that thought made Hiccup tremble like a leaf. Even young predatory animals were dangerous, they could bite his hand or give him a nasty scratch with their claws. Hiccup certainly didn't want to suffer injury on top of insult today, so he quickly picked himself off the

ground.

He took a few cautious steps back not to startle whatever was hiding there and convince it into pouncing on him. When he was sure he was a safe distance away, he turned and bolted back towards the village. He may not be happy there, but he would be safe.

Whatever that thing was, he didn't want it anywhere near him.

* * *

><p>Hiccup had just made it to the edge of the forest and saw the entirety of the village come into view. He looked down to see all the people having gotten through most of their chores and were sitting on the porches on their houses, talking with each other while drinking their mugs of beer and snacking on chicken and yak legs. Things had gotten along just fine without him, in fact people looked really happy. Did that start once he left, he wondered? Were people happy because he was gone? He tried to put it out of his head â€“ he'd been thinking enough depressing thoughts for one day, probably enough for a whole week.<p>

He just looked out to the houses of the other kids, the square where the stone circle was and most Vikings gathered, and the forge just past it. Waitâ€¦

Hiccup shrieked and grabbed his auburn streaks in distress. "The forge! I totally forgot! Oh, Gobber's gonna be so mad at me!" He remembered just at that moment that Gobber had wanted him to clean up before he got back. He rushed over to the forge as quick as his little legs could carry him.

He ducked and swerved past the Vikings that were still doing their jobs, carrying large logs of wood for their houses, some having three or four logs under the crook of a single arm. This time, people seemed so happy or busy that they completely ignored him as he went by. Good, Hiccup thought to himself, the last thing he needed was anybody being angry at him.

He made it to the forge in perhaps record time, and stopped just before the door on the side, giving himself a moment to catch his breath. With bated breath, he grabbed the handle on the door and pushed slowly, trying to be as sneaky as possible. The door creaked open slightly, and he wormed through to enter the forge.

The forge was a simple place, it had all the necessities a blacksmith needed, nothing too fancy or over the top. In the back of the room there was a large fireplace built from what was little more than a column of stone with a hole near the bottom surrounded by a small hearth of stone bricks, the inside currently put out and pitch black from all the soot and the many hours the flame would normally be lit. Next to the fireplace was a large stone wheel fixed into a wooden sawhorse with a foot pedal connected to it, a grinding wheel used to sharpen the blades of swords or axes that might have become dull from repeated use. Also close by was a cube formed from the same hastily crafted stone bricks with a bellow pump nearby and coals placed inside, with tongs on top; along with the fireplace this could be used for reheating and reshaping metal.

A barrel filled with water was on the other side of the fireplace for

cooling down the metal once it had been shaped; the clouds of steam that always rose up in large amounts always made Hiccup sweat, and he always remembered how the barrels needed to be constantly refilled. Scores of weapons, swords, lances, shields, axes, crossbows, spears, and spiked hammers were placed on shelves or stored in wooden barrels on the back wall, some broken in some way and needing repair while others were on reserve to be used as quick replacements for Vikings needing a quick change out in the field. The benches were littered with tongs, forge hammers, plenty of nuts and bolts and wooden handles and spare wood planks, scraps of metal and leather, with even more of the same wrapped up in nets hanging from the wooden beams that held up the ceiling. The shutters of the front window at the front near the open main entrance were closed off, indicating that the forge was currently closed at this time.

Hiccup breathed a sigh of relief at that. If the forge was closed right now, then that meant Gobber was not yet here and wouldn't catch him late. He hastily grabbed his apron from the side of the house and tied the straps around his back. He then grabbed a broom nearby and started sweeping the thick layer of dust that had gathered on the floor, turning his back to the main workspace of the forge.

"Well, good ta see you could take time ou' of yur busy schedule ta do yur job." A dry voice sounded from behind him.

Hiccup flinched heavily to see that Gobber was standing behind him, arms crossed, jaw fixed, eyebrow cocked and looking not really all that angry, but none too amused, either. He grasped the broom with both hands and tried his best to look anywhere but at his irritated mentor.

"Um-uhâ€¦ w-wellâ€¦ I was just, um, I-I was-"Hiccup stuttered.

Gobber raised up his prosthetic hook that he had replaced his hammer from earlier with. "Ah, forget it. Ya got time ta yap, ya got time ta clean, so get to it." He shooed him off while he started up the bellows to heat up the coals. He grabbed a spare sword from the shelf that had been bent completely out of shape and started to heat the metal. He began whistling a cheerful tune once the coals started to heat up to pass the time until the sword would be hard enough.

Hiccup just watched nervously for a moment, just feeling the stifling heat emanating from the heated rocks, the air growing intense and hot around him, watching the small particles of ignited coal dust flat through the air, but eventually returned to his sweeping.

After a while, Gobber had taken the sword over the bench, sweeping off most of its contents and placing the sword on a metal anvil near the edge. Once again, he replaced his prosthetic, switching it back to the hammer, and began pounding the soft misshapen metal. Hiccup had by now cleaned most of the floor and turned back to Gobber, just watching him carefully. Gobber had managed to pick up on Hiccup staring at him and grinned, if only slightly.

"I take it somethin's on yur mind?" Gobber asked wryly. "Well, might as well spit it out. I think we've all learned by now how dangerous you thinkin' can be."

Hiccup frowned and turned away after having finally caught himself staring. "Can we please not talk about it? I just wanna forget it ever happenedâ€¦"

"Oh, you an' me both," Gobber said passively. "But if there's one thing Vikings know how ta do, besides fightin', drinkin', and sailin', not ta mention avoid bathin'," he added once he gave his armpits a good whiff, "it's hold a grudge."

"Well, it's not like I planned for all that stuff to happen!" Hiccup cried out suddenly. "How was I supposed to know that dumb piece of junk would make such a mess? I try to do something good and all I get is everybody super mad at me!"

"Ah, true, you're not exactly everybody's favorite runt right now." Gobber added while he just continued to pound.

"I know, Snotlout made that pretty obvious." Hiccup said.

Gobber quickly stopped his hammering and looked at Hiccup, the boy just sweeping more and more on one spot of floor absentmindedly. He would never admit it, but he was petty worried about his young apprentice. He had figured from the very beginning that Snotlout would grow up to be nothing but a bad egg, already showing too much ego for someone his age. And now that he thought about it, Hiccup did look a bit frazzled. Obviously his cousin had said something that really got to him, and the boy in typical stubborn Viking fashion, was trying hard to conceal it.

The smith let out a heavy sigh and placed his good hand to his hip, turning to face Hiccup fully. "All right, what'd the little muttonhead do?"

"I said I don't wanna talk about it." Hiccup replied back.

"Ah, you didn't wan' ta talk about yur litt'l disaster on wheels, I'm talkin' about Snotlout. Come on, out with it, wha' happened?" Gobber asked. Again, Hiccup just stayed silent while sweeping the same spot more and more.

Gobber sighed and shook his head; obviously this was going to require a bit harder of a gentle nudge. "Ya know, yur more like yer father than anyone around cares ta think. He was never the type to talk about his problems either, always just went wit' the quick solution an' smashed some defenseless tree. Did it work? Neeegh, who could say?" He shrugged. "A thousan' broken stumps later an' that mug 'a his is still scowlin'." Hiccup, again, continued to sweep that spot under his feet. Gobber couldn't help but notice the resemblance to how Stoick would only grunt when he stopped by the house mere moments ago. Like he said, those two were more alike than anyone thought.

"All right, enough wit' tha sweepin! Anymore an' I'll be able ta see ma reflection in the floor!" He shouted after a few more moments as he picked Hiccup off the floor by his collar, dangling him in the air.

Hiccup thrashed and grunted in frustration, swinging his arms around and threatening to whack Gobber with the broom that was still in his hand. "Let me go, put me down!" He yelled.

"Not until I get some answers. That smug little troll said somethin' ta tick you off an' I wanna know what!" Gobber said.

"It's none of your business!" Hiccup cried.

"Oh, it isn't, is it? Whether either of us likes it er not, you're ma apprentice Hiccup, an' that means ah need you ta keep this place runnin' smoothly and help folks when they need it!" Gobber reasoned. "The same way your father expects you to when you take his place as chief, but none o tha's gonna happen unless you learn ta solve yur own problems first! Now are you gonna get this thing off yur chest already, or am I gonna have ta dangle ya from the roof?"

At the mention of his father, Hiccup had gone completely silent, hanging limply from Gobber's hand and letting his grip on the broom slip and causing it to drop to the floor. With the way everyone was so angry at him, he'd let it slip from his mind completely that he was going to succeed his father and become the next chief of Berk, governing over each and every one of them. Like Gobber said, people would be coming to him with their individual problems seeking his guidance; come times of war and in ongoing battles with the dragons, they would look to him for leadership.

But his mistake from months ago had been causing him to question everything he had once believed. He had to wonder if people were now questioning it just as he was now whether he'd be a good chief. He didn't even want to be chief at all, but always figured he'd just be mindlessly groomed into the position without any say whatsoever. He imagined that by the time he came of age, as reluctant as he would be, he'd still know all the intricacies of being a proper chief and produce satisfactory results â€“ nothing big, just enough to keep Berk from crumbling into the ocean. His father could at least be proud of him for that.

Hiccup looked solemn, squinting his eyes in clear distress, pausing just a moment more before finally giving Gobber an answer. "Heâ€¦ he called meâ€¦ 'Useless.'"

Gobber's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "What now?"

"Hiccup the Useless. He said it was my new title, 'cause I can't do anything right." Hiccup said not bothering to look Gobber in the eye. Just saying the title was enough to bring shame.

Both master and apprentice were silent, letting the nickname sink in, the name that would label the young boy for years to come. "Huhâ€¦" Gobber said after a long pause. "Not what I woulda come up with."

This earned him a worried glance from the boy still dangling in his grip. "Really, what would you have called me?"

"Ah, I'm thinkin' likeâ€¦" Gobber cursed himself for his lack of creativity; he was never very good when it came to names. "Eh, how boutâ€¦ Hiccup the 'Useful?'"

Hiccup just pouted back with his curious expression returned to a look of sadness. "That's not much better."

"Fine then," Gobber exasperatedly shot back. "Settle for 'Hiccup the Whiny'."

"Gobber!"

"Better yet, let's go with 'Hiccup the Worrywart,'" said Gobber with a crooked smile on his face, the stone tooth in his exaggerated lower jaw sticking out among the rest of his misshapen teeth. "'Cause you're worryin' too much over what other folk think a you. If yu wanna think yur Hiccup the Useless, then far be it from me ta naysay. Ah'll be more than happy ta engrave et on yur first sword." He pointed his hammer straight into Hiccup's little chest, causing him to topple over. "But I'd say a gewd righ' hook is in order for the nimrod tha tells ya that's wha' yu should be. If you gotta listen ta anyone else, start wit' the people that mattar."

Hiccup shifted his moods again, returning once more to confusion as he stared up at Gobber. "The people that matter?" He asked in confusion.

"Like friends for starters." Gobber pointed out.

Hiccup frowned at that. He was supposed to trust friends to tell him what he was and wasn't, what he could and couldn't do? The last 'friend' he trusted to do that told him straight to his face that he was 'nothing but trouble.' Astrid had never been so cold to him before â€“ they always used to laugh and have fun together, helping Astrid's mother with baking, doing chores around the house and pretending to be dragon slayers. And come to think of it, Fishlegs was once a friend of his too, always hanging out with him reading books and enjoying a snack in the great hall. Then one day he up and left Hiccup to go and hang out with Snotlout and the twins, even though it hardly looked like he was enjoying their company. All his so called friends had up and left him, so who was he supposed to trust now? Why did everything have to change, and how _did_ it change so quickly?

Gobber noticed Hiccup's frown and just turned back to the bench to start hammering on the now-cooled blade. "All right, off with ya."

"Huh?" Hiccup looked back up to the smith and asked.

"Yu heard me, yur done for the day. I don' need a gloomy gus like you around. Just head on home." Gobber said without even looking, just sticking the sword back in the freshly pumped coals to reheat it.

Hiccup just sat there for a moment lost before standing up slowly. "Okay," was all he said as he untied his apron and hung it back up by the small nail on the wall where it had been when he first came in. He gave himself a good dusting once more to shake off any residual dust and snuck past the door again. "See ya, I guess." The last thing he said before closing the door.

"Be here all the earlier the next day!" He heard Gobber call while he went back up the hill to his house.

* * *

><p>Hiccup had headed over to the small ledge that overlooked the village plaza, not that far a distance from the forge where he just was. Of course, nothing was really that far when one lives in a tight knit village such as this. He could see Gobber still working heartily at the anvil, pounding what looked to be a block for a brand new hammer. Other Vikings were already lined up ready to get their weapons repaired just in time for the next dragon raid, whenever it would be. The Vikings of Berk had long since learned to sleep with their weapons under their pillow and ready to fight at a moment's notice, and yet they could hardly do so with weapons that had more cracks in them than the stones in the circle placed dead center in the open area. Hiccup dangled his feet from the ledge, kicking them back and forth and feeling the small tufts of grass he seated upon shift beneath him and itch his bottom.<p>

Hiccup just kept thinking about what Gobber had said and trying to find even one person among the throngs of warriors who could fit the description of 'friend.' A friend wasâ€¦ well, it was hard for him to put into words, it was just one of those little things that one takes for granted. A child was no different, being so capable of making a friend after just a short exchange of a few words. A friend, as Hiccup or any other child would understand it, was someone who makes you happy, and no one here could fit that mold well enough. Their coldness bent them out of shape, deforming and twisting them into near strangers, them, the people that Hiccup had and would spend his whole life knowing.

He felt a sharp pain in his shoulder suddenly, like someone had punched him, and turned around to see Astrid. Hiccup pouted slightly, inwardly chastising himself for not being able to guess that very instant. Astrid had always been a violent child; punching people was her form of greeting them. She had picked up on the Viking way well, which probably explained why he wasn't all that happy to see her.

"Hey," she said simply.

"Hey," he mumbled back.

Astrid took that as her cue to sit down beside him and so she did, placing herself mere inches away from him. Subconsciously, he scooted over, furthering the distance between them, not feeling all that comfortable with her right now. Apprehensive as he was, the two just sat there in silence, only increasing the awkward feeling shared between them to a level so great it was practically visible in front of them.

Quickly growing frustrated and impatient, Astrid decided to make the first move. "Look, I'm sorry, okay?" She blurted out.

Hiccup turned to look at her. "Huh?"

She huffed. "For saying what I said back there. I didn't mean it."

Hiccup's raised eyebrows at that moment sunk down, morphing his gaze into a light glare. "Then why _did_ you say it?"

"I don't know, alright? It's just that my mama and papa have been saying that I shouldn't be hanging out with you anymore." She said.

Hiccup's glare turned more intense. Was she really going to use her parents as an excuse to get out of this? The Astrid he knew never used excuses for anything, certainly not for insulting someone she had known and played with since birth.

"Why would your mom and dad tell you something like that?" Hiccup asked, suspicion edging his voice like a razor. Astrid said nothing. "Is it because of what I did?"

"Something like that." She muttered.

"Well, Gobber says that everyone should just forget about it." Hiccup retorted turning his gaze back to the square. "Sure, I messed up big time, and I get it. Nobody has to be mean about it."

The little girl's gaze softened as she looked at her longtime companion, pity etched in her eyes like the runes in the wood and stone that comprised their homes. She personally wasn't very comfortable on the matter, but she could understand the logic in her parents' decision and the insight towards the bigger picture. Their order to her to distance herself from him was made for her benefit, but she figured Hiccup at least deserved an explanation.

"It's not like anybody tries to be mean-"She tried to reason.

"Could've fooled me," Hiccup shot back. His father wouldn't be happy, he could already guess, to learn that he was beginning to pick up Gobber's sarcastic tone.

Astrid let loose a sigh. "You know how I always said I wanna be a shield-maiden?"

Hiccup looked back to her and nodded â€“ it had indeed been a dream of hers to become a warrior and fight on the front lines alongside her father and the others. Most women in the tribe took up household roles like cooking in the Great Hall, even if they barely had the talent for it, or watching over the household. His own mother, who had died when he was born, had settled for the latter alongside helping out at the healers' huts to tend to warriors who had been critically wounded in battle.

But Astrid knew from the very beginning that all she wanted to do with her life was grab an axe and chop off dragon wings and limbs. Hiccup, despite his abhorrence for violence of any kind, could only admire her for knowing so soon what her dream was.

"Well, my papa says it's time I started taking that seriously and start training. And I have to make sure to get rid of anyâ€¦" she tried her best to be gentle with the next word.
"Distractions."

"Distractions?" Hiccup asked, not sure what the word meant.

"You," she said simply. "You're small and clumsy and not much of a fighter. My mama says that people are saying stuff about you and it's not good."

"What kinda stuff?" Hiccup asked in worry. "You mean like the stuff Snotlout was saying before?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

Hiccup heard his heart thumping in his chest, slamming against his tiny cage in danger of bursting right out. His hands began to tremble and his lips quivered, letting loose the one question that he dreaded asking from the moment it popped into his mind in the woods. "So people really don't like meâ€¦ because I'm small and weak?"

Astrid's silence only confirmed it, revealed what was beneath the surface of abnormal irritation for an invention gone wrong and what needed to be done. It was strange, really; for finding out the disturbing truth about how a bully's words were seen as common knowledge to everyone around him, it didn't hurt as bad as he thought it would. But that was probably because of everything else happening in that one day that had been culminating up for months, hitting him faster than one of Snotlout's pebbles to the head, leaving him completely numb. The only way to turn it all around was to do the impossible and make a mini-Stoick out of him, and the more Hiccup thought about it happening, changing everything he was to make other people happy, the more he didn't like it.

He gritted his teeth and scowled. "I don't get it. People hate me because I'm small, and you say they don't wanna be mean? That doesn't make any sense!"

"Well, I guess not, but-"

"It's dumb and weird and crazy, but-but everyone's thinking it! Even you!" He stood up quick and pointed at Astrid. "You won't admit it, but you don't like me either; that's why you didn't do anything when Snotlout was picking on me!"

"No, that's not-".

"I thought you were my friend, Astrid, I thought we were always gonna have each other's' backs! But I guess I was wrong â€“ I don't have any friends!" With that Hiccup stormed off away from Astrid who turned to look after him, standing up and following for only a few short paces.

"Wait!" Astrid cried out. "Where are you going?"

"What do you care? Just leave me alone!" Hiccup called out.

"But you're heading for the woods! Your dad says we're not allowed to go in there alone!" She warned, her voice getting louder as he got farther. In truth Hiccup didn't even notice he was once again heading into the forest. But once again, his distressed state blurred out his surrounding environment in his eyes and mind. He just continued marching forward, regardless of whatever consequences he might face once his dad found out.

Anger started to well up in Astrid, released in the form of red-tinted cheeks and clenched fists. She was tired of being put through this guilt-trip that Hiccup was putting down on her, and she admitted that yes, she did at least start to see him as the others did. Guilt and remorse were feelings only belonging to the weak, children were taught, and she was by no means weak. She was a Hofferson, and her clan always faced forward with fierce dignity,

regardless of whatever challenge was presented to them. She raised both her arms to her mouth and screamed as loud as she could.

"YOU KNOW WHAT, I TAKE IT BACK! YOU REALLY ARE NOTHING BUT TROUBLE!"

But Hiccup didn't hear her, that or he didn't care. He just marched forward into the trees until he was out of sight.

He went deeper and deeper into the woods until he found a large rock covered in fuzzy moss to sit on surrounded by a group of smaller rocks surrounded by some of the larger, more closely bunched together trees in the forest and sat there, just letting steam out. He crossed his arms and set his face in a scowl that no cheery tune, no funny joke, and no delicious bowl of jam or honey that he loved so when his father brought them could fix.

Just like before, he heard a rustling sound coming from a bush nearby. It was the same level of noise, which gave hints that it was the same type of creature from before. Looking around Hiccup noticed in recollection that he was not that far from the spot where he had tripped and fell before heading back to the village. So perhaps the creature that was rustling inside the bush wasn't just the same kind of creature from before, it was the exact same one.

Again, Hiccup felt fear at what lurked inside the bush, lying in wait to attack and possibly kill him. This time, however, his fear was overpowered by an alarming sense of curiosity. When he thought about it, he was quite curious the last time too, a part of him wanting to go over and just look inside the bush to see what was there. It was quite possible that fear of the unknown was getting the better of him, and it could very well have been just a rabbit or a squirrel like he had first thought. He took a gulp and reminded himself that Vikings were brave and strong, and if he couldn't be a Viking in body, he could at least be one in spirit.

He decided to take the chance and look.

Standing up and sliding off the rock, he dusted his bottom free of residual moss or any dampness from it. He slowly crept towards the bush, taking tiptoe by tiny tiptoe, his steps so gentle they barely made a sound. He reached the bush and reached into the tangle of leaves and branches, parting them away to gain a clearer view, and peered inside.

It was hard to see for a moment, but squinting his eyes he could just make out something amongst the weaving entanglement. Deep inside, he could just make out a pair of wide, acidic green eyes with thin black slits.

* * *

><p>Review, follow, favorite. Next chapter's what you early reviewers have been waiting for!

3. Chapter 3

**Thanks to everyone who have favorite and followed so far - again, I cannot believed how quickly this has gained popularity. I only hope

the chapters to come are just as to your liking, this story is gonna be pretty intense. **

Rumbling Night Cutter: I am not deliberately trying to flame Astrid or anyone in this story. Sure, I said I didn't like her, but that's not to say I outright hate her. Honestly, there are many traits in her that I admire. I guess I'm just being a bit bitter towards what happened in the first movie when Hiccup got good in dragon training and less then exemplary traits showed. I do think her character improved greatly when she found out about Toothless and by the time of Httyd2, so let's just say now I'm a bit lukewarm to her character. Believe me, there are plenty below her on my favorites list.

six samurai of dragon order: Who can say just yet whether or not he will leave? But if I write it so he does, I hope you'll respect my decision. I'm going to stay true to the plotline I have set up for this, so again, I hope its to people's liking.

BlackFireFalcon: Glad you like the story so far!

And so here's what you've been waiting for - get ready for the fluff! To me no HttyD fanfic is complete without a little HicTooth fluff!

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* * *

><p>Hiccup just peered into the bush with the pair of animalistic eyes watching him just returning his gaze, their stares locked upon one another. He noticed the spectrum of different hues of greens melding together in the sceleras, creating a near luminescence even in the shadows of the leaves. The eyes didn't even move or blink, just focused on him with such an intensity it was almost as if they were looking into Hiccup's very soul.<p>

Hiccup himself could feel that sense of vulnerability greater than anything else, like his heart was stripped bare of everything. It strained his eyelids and forehead, but his eyes could only widen further, and Hiccup visibly forced himself to follow the creature's lead and not blink, for fear of what may happen.

Finally, after a near eternity, the eyes shifted slowly, and a soft black mass came inching out from within the bush. It pressed against his nose ever so slightly, and Hiccup could feel the roughness of what seemed like scales against its tip. He felt a gentle tuft of air upon the bottom of his face, and Hiccup almost choked at the scent of fish and smoke that came into his nostrils. As quickly as it came, the mass â€“ its snout, Hiccup guessed - started to sniff him, inspecting him as it seemed. Hiccup was extremely nervous at that point, and kept himself still without making any sudden movements for fear of the creature lashing out.

Then the creature did something entirely unexpected. Its snout raised up and its mouth opened, and a small, slimy pink mass squirmed out. Its forked tongue brushed up against the tip of Hiccup's nose, giving him a tiny little lick.

Hiccup finally zone in and panic filled him all at once; his pace quickened and he began to hyperventilate. Just as soon as the tongue

disappeared back into the mouth, he let loose a terrified scream and scampered away, turning his back and shuffling and clawing against the grass.

The creature screamed too, although to Hiccup it sounded more like a high pitched screech, and vanished from the bush. Hiccup ran towards the nearest tree and hid behind it â€“ the tree's trunk was so thick it hid his entire body from view. His fingers dug into the bark, the rugged wood damaging his nails, while his back remained nailed to the tree. He continued to breathe heavily in fear, his mind clouded with panic over just what manner of creature had apparently tried to taste him.

Finally, after a few moments of collecting himself, he dared to look back and see if it was still there. He heard it screech, as horrible a sound as it was, and saw it vanish, so maybe it ran away. He peeked over the side of the tree to see the distance between his tree and the bush completely empty. It didn't follow him to his relief, but scanning the area he could see something move behind a tree directly across from him next to the bush where he found the creature.

Something that looked to be a head peeked out from the bush. It was as black as night and coated in shiny obsidian scales. The head was long and somewhat flat, with tiny, floppy little ear flaps sticking up in the air at the sides. Green eyes with black slits were on each side of a tiny snout, peering at him with a level of nervousness easily rivaling his own.

Hiccup gasped and pulled his head back behind the tree, barely noticing that the creature did the same.

He peeked out again, only halfway this time, and again the creature followed his actions, only watching with one eye. He pulled back again, and again the creature imitated him.

He decided to be a bit bolder this time and peek out halfway, leaning his body and grabbing the side of the tree with his left hand. Once more the creature mimicked him, holding onto the tree with a black paw with claws that Hiccup figured could tear through him like butter. A long black appendage stuck out from the ground that looked like a tail with two small fins on both sides of the end, wagging back and forth.

Hiccup gathered all the courage he could muster and moved almost entirely from behind the tree, bring his hands close to his chest so as to quickly hold them out should the need to protect himself arise. He still barely had any idea what this thing was or what it was capable of, so it would be best to err on the side of caution.

As expected, the mysterious creature imitated him once more, carefully pacing out into full view and Hiccup could finally see it in totality. Its entire body was as black and scaly as its head and tail, with a long neck that craned out from the rest of its body. It was quadrupedal, walking on four legs, and though they were folded, Hiccup could recognize a pair of big black wings against its body. They looked somewhat like a bat's the way the membrane stretched out against the bones that made up the visible wing joints. The beast shuddered slightly and continued to fix Hiccup with a curious stare, the slits in its eyes rounding out slightly. Eyes locked on the

creature, Hiccup could finally recognize it for what it was, and the answer made him break into a cold sweat out of pure terror.

It was a dragon.

Whether out of a strange calmness at the recognition of this discovery or fear so great it seized control of his body, Hiccup stayed there in place. Every voice in his mind screamed at him to run, to escape the forest as quickly as he could and never come back. He had never seen a dragon like this before, and he had no idea just what it was capable of. That just made it all the more dangerous; his father had always told him of what dragons could do, how they could fly through the sky, rend through their houses with their talons and claws as sharp as swords and burn their homes to the ground with destructive blasts of fire. He always remembered how the dragons stole their food and how there would always be less of the sheep and chickens he loved to play with so much because the dragons would always take them away. Sometimes, the dragons would even go so far as to kidnap humans and take them away to eat them. Hiccup shuddered and wondered if this dragon was going to do that to him.

But upon closer inspection, Hiccup wondered how the dragon was going to do that. From the looks of things, this dragon was pretty small, only a bit bigger than a Terrible Terror, the smallest dragon that Vikings knew of: annoying, but still bad. The dragon sat up now with its legs close together, and Hiccup saw it was just taller than him, only by a few inches. He was sure dragons got to be a lot bigger, much bigger than even Vikings, well the full grown ones anyway. If you were a child like Hiccup, you were practically an ant, and yet he doubted his size or age would warrant mercy from an animal as dangerous as this one.

Another flash of epiphany hit him. This dragon probably wasn't all that big because it was young. Quite possibly, this was a _baby_ dragon, or at least some kind of dragon toddler.

The dragon just sat there, wiggling its body in nervousness or anticipation or some form of energy, its eyes slowly dilating into full black orbs. The human standing in front of it had it very curious, ever since it first sniffed him when he had come into the forest earlier. It caught wind of a variety of different scents: the smells of wood and fish and dirt and smoke on him, all blended together like the colors in those beautiful lights in the sky that came out at night sometimes.

It was a strange feeling, something entirely new to the little dragon, and it got it excited, being an adventurer by heart. The other humans seemed really bad, the way they fought and hurt and killed dragons, but this one was different, he could tell now that they stood face to face; he was just like those beautiful lights. His eyes sparkled and his soul gleamed with a rainbow of greens like nature itself, yet in a way that it seemed only they could.

The dragon wasn't sure why, but it liked this little boy, and maybe he would want to play with him. But it was also wary of whether or not he would scream again like he did before and ran away; how silly, the dragon thought, that he would be afraid of a little dragon like him. Still, it seemed this human was easily startled, so the dragon made sure to move slowly. It stopped shaking and ever so carefully, it ducked its head, arched its back up and stepped forward, lifting

his paw just barely off the ground and setting it inches ahead.

Hiccup gasped and flinched, trembling uncontrollably. "N-no... Stay awayâ€¦"

The dragon's ear flaps and its spirits sunk at this; did this mean that the human didn't like it? It only wanted to play with him, but as silly as it seemed, the human was still scared and wanted to keep distance between them. The dragon tried its best to seem as non-menacing as possible, letting out a low coo and purring heavily, whatever it could do to show the human it wasn't a threat.

It seemed to work, because this time it could get a few steps closer, a few tiny steps anyway. But when it tried to take a bigger step, the human gasped again.

"P-p-please." Hiccup begged. "Please d-don't hurt meâ€¦"

The dragon backed its paw and head away and huddled itself up in sadness with its tail curled around it, letting out a tiny little whimper at the human's apparent belief it would do him harm. It just wanted to play , but if the human was this scared, maybe it would be best if it left and not upset him anymore. That truly saddened the dragon as it imagined, even as the human shuffled further away, all the ways they could have fun. But it didn't want to give up just yet, something inside the dragon told it that the two of them could be friends, almost like they _needed_ to be, and a dragon trusts its instincts.

"N-nice... nice dragon..." He mumbled.

Without warning, the dragon pounced forward with a burst from his hind legs, alarming Hiccup back into the tree trunk. After panting enough to burst his lungs, Hiccup suddenly found a second wind and started screaming and running away. His legs carried him deeper into the forest, with the dragon screeching and flapping in the air right behind him.

* * *

><p>Stoick had long since finished his paperwork at his home and since gone over to the Great Hall for a round of ale with some of his fellow Vikings. He sat at the center of a long table just past the large stone pit where a fire was currently alight to warm the hall from the cold temperatures brought in by the open doors. Light filtered in from the small torches lined along the wall and from the large hole overhead, long boarded shut with erratically placed planks of wood that had since hardened and stale from the elements; a large, haunting golden statue of a dragon with a sword run through its body hung just below.<p>

The room was held up by large columns of wood and stone with carved images of Vikings sailing and killing dragons, the foundations of their tradition, and records of their ancestors' greatest achievements. Tables were littered everywhere, all filled with Vikings having their fill of food and drink while talking with their fellow villagers regarding the day's events, to swap stories of their dragon killing exploits, or the ever-amusing prospect of who among them when paired off would win in a fist fight.

The table Stoick was at was no different, each of the Viking roughhousing and yelling at each other just now succumbing to the intoxication their beverages provided. The only one who remained sober aside from him was the gruff looking Viking with heavy stubble and a long-horned Viking helmet sitting by his side. Spitelout, Stoick's brother and second-in-command, Snotlout's father, and practically an adult version of him with ten times the arrogant attitude, was munching down on a chicken wing, tearing the meat right of the bone with his teeth and giving his brother a good talking to.

"I'm tellin' ya, Stoick, something is just not righ' wit' tha boy o yurs." Spitelout said waving his leg in the face of the Berkian chief. "You've seen it, haven't ya? That invention o' his has got the whole island spooked."

"Tell me about it." Stoick said with a hand to his head and taking another sip from his wooden mug. "I'm still handing out apologies for it."

"And you know this is only the beginnin'.'Sonly a mattar o' time before he pulls somethin' like this again. The villagers are keepin' on their toes for the day it does."

Stoick let loose a heavy sigh, the alcohol on his breath highly pungent. Gobber had told him in the days before that horrible night how excited Hiccup was whenever he went into his little space in the back of the forge to do something or other. That twinkle of excitement was just as present the moment brought that contraption out into the open and let it loose. Even if this first attempt ended in failure, Hiccup would most certainly try and build another new machine, one Stoick could already assume to be just as dysfunctional. Once that boy got an idea in his head there was no stopping him; sadly that seemed to be one of the very few things he inherited from him. It frustrated Stoick to no end that the classic and reliable Viking tenacity born in all their children would be applied to something so utterly foolhardy. He moved his large hand to his face and let it slide down in mortification.

Spitelout looked around, darting his head left and right before leaning in and covering his mouth right beside Stoick's ear. "Look, I'v been talkin' this over with the Thorstons and the Ingermans," Spitelout added, hoping the added comments of the twins' and Fishlegs parents would be able to sway the chief. In a show of behavior rather uncharacteristic for Viking, he tried to be as delicate with the matter as possible. "And we're of the opinion that perhaps becomin' chieftain of Berk may be a little much to hope for fur a boy o' hisâ€¦ limited capabilitiesâ€¦"

Stoick cocked an eyebrow and looked at his brother, swearing this was headed into familiar territory. "Go onâ€¦" he said.

"The whole village has been talking about it, actually, for a couple o' years now. He came early, barely survivin' childbirth, and shows little signs o' growth; you've seen how he's the smallest of his age!" Spitelout gestured. "And I dunnae think I need ta remind you o' how many winters he's spent lyin' in bed sick!"

That, Spitelout had a point on Stoick figured. Hiccup had, for the

longest time, had been a very sickly child. Every time the frost settled in on the island, Hiccup would always end up bedridden with a fever, coughing and sneezing harshly with little energy to even sit up in bed. By the time of his fifth year, he hardly even needed to alert the healers before they started coming in themselves. His illnesses were easy enough to treat, it was just the frequency of them that got under people's skin. He had been told it was in part Hiccup's poor appetite and skinny frame that contributed to it, his body not getting the proper nutrients it needed to fend off the sickness. Stoick had always tried to feed Hiccup more upon hearing it, but too much and he would just vomit it all out afterwards.

"And his health, or lack thereof, is just the tip o' the iceberg! He can' even look a' a dagger without flinchin', let alone wield it. Arms like thread, a spine like jelly, it's all enough ta question how strongly the Haddock blood runs in him."

Stoick scowled. "Get to the point, already. Headache or not, he's still my boy and I'm not too fond o' hearing people mock him."

"The point is, make him chief and Berk'll be the laughin'stock o' tha whole archipelago!" Spitelout shouted. Lucklily, the rest of the Vikings over at the other table could hardly hear him due to the off-key singing and small fist fights had amongst the Vikings at their own table. "The Hooligan Tribe needs a proper heir, Stoick; your son is no leader."

"Are you suggestin' I betray my wife and bear a child with another woman?" Stoick growled. Even the thought angered him; such an action would be nothing short of betrayal to his beloved wife Valka. He would never forget how that four winged dragon appeared on that fateful night seven years ago when Hiccup was still a baby and took her away to devour her. His nightmares were still haunted by her screams of his name as she vanished, a constant failure of his vow to keep her safe and their family whole. As angry as he was with Hiccup, his son was an epitaph of his wife, his last remaining piece of her, and he swore upon her grave that he would watch over him.

"Of course not, brother; I know you still bear the weight of Valka's death within you. Far be it from me or any of us to befoul the memory of the dead." Spitelout apologized as he placed his hand on Stoick's shoulder in an act of comfort. "But keep in mindâ€¦ there is anotherâ€¦"

The realization dawned upon the Berkian chief in an instant, even before Spitelout could finish speaking, from years of repeated conversations of the like. "Ohâ€¦ this again!?" He slammed his mug upon the table, its metal base producing a hard cracking sound. "Spitelout, we've had this discussion a thousand times! Your son cannot be chief!"

"Snotlout is the strongest boy on Berk! He can wrestle down a yak in a few minutes tops!"

"And yet he is not a direct descendant of the current chief," Stoick added. "Succession has always been ruled by bloodlines. You would argue a boy who carries little Haddock blood in favor of one who carries none at all?"

"He holds my name, but he still carries a Haddock's blood; our

father's blood runs in my veins, and so it flows through his. And remember he was first in line, until your little runt showed up." He growled, suddenly rising from his chair. Between the two men, the surrounding noise blanked out, and all that could be heard by either of them was each other. "Just keep in mind who among the two of them is the better choice. I'm a patient man, my brother, I'll wait as long as it takes for you to see."

Stoick was ready to retort; Snotlout could wrestle down a yak, sure, but he had an ego the size of one to match. And Stoick knew it would only grow worse with time â€“ soon enough the boy's attitude would become completely unbearable. He had hopes that Spitelout could maybe work it out of him, that it could just be a phase he was going through, since he seemed to be growing faster than most of the other children.

Then again, looking back on Spitelout's behavior in the past it was clear to see where Snotlout got his attitude from. A chief was an equal among his people, as Stoick learned from their father, and yet the Jorgenson clan had a nasty habit of looking down on the world. Just as he was about to state all this, though, a young girl with big blond pigtails came rushing into the hall. It was the Hofferson girl, Astrid, Stoick remembered. She looked highly distressed as she made it to the table where they were at.

"Chief! Haaâ€¦ haa â€¦" She panted heavily.

"What is it, lass?" Stoick asked, concerned.

"It'sâ€¦ Hiccup! He went into the woods!"

At that point, Stoick's face turned red with rage. "WHAT!? He was told a million times never to go into that forest!" He raised a hand to his head in frustration at his son's refusal to listen to orders before looking back to Astrid. "Find Gobber! Tell him to round up a search party and meet me at the entrance." Astrid obeyed and ran off to find the smith. Before headed out, Stoick took one last look at his astonished brother's face.

"We'll continue this later." Stoick said as he ran out the massive doors.

Spitelout only scowled at his brother's retreating figure. He had said that many times before some issue always came up regarding Hiccup. Perhaps, the man thought as he took one more bite out of his now lukewarm chicken leg, it was about time he took matters into his own hands.

* * *

><p>Hiccup ran farther and farther through the woods, hopping off of logs and rocks and dashing through trees, vanishing into the abundant green all around him. The little black dragon was still flying after him, flapping his large black wings in an attempt to keep up with him, crying out over and over. Hiccup's fear grew stronger and stronger with each infantile shriek that passed the dragon's fangs, imagining all the ways said fangs could rend him to shreds. His legs were so tired from all the distance he had covered it felt like they were going to fall off, and his chest was on fire, but Hiccup didn't care. Even as he stumbled and wobbled, he just continued to

run.<p>

He soon came upon the edge of a beautiful cove surrounded on all sides by a steep rocky slope. Within the cove was a lake being fed by a waterfall pouring out from the side of the slope; the lake looked shallow, possibly only a few feet deep. There were massive trees that grew atop the cliff tops that joined the ranks of the other trees alongside them, lush green leaves growing both above on their branches and below their roots that extended all the way to the cove floor. The ridges in the rock face were lined with moss and algae that also decorated the rocks sprinkled here and there around this environment. The rest was covered in a low-cut grass that looked softer than any blanket Hiccup might have ever been wrapped in. In another situation, Hiccup might have been completely enamored with how beautiful and peaceful this place was.

And yet he barely even had time to register the scenery as his foot teetered right over the edge of the slope. He wobbled and dangled, holding out his thin arms in a desperate attempt to keep his balance. Back and forth, back and forthâ€¦ until finally he could hold on no longer and he fell.

He gritted his teeth, shut his eyes as tightly as possible, waiting for the first impact of his body against the slope. It would continue on and on until he landed at the bottom with multiple cuts and broken bones. But that first hit never came; instead he felt something snatch his arms and suddenly he could no longer feel the ground. The pressure on both of his forearms was strong; something had a hold of him and was not going to let him go.

He opened his eyes and looked up to seeâ€¦ the dragon, carrying him.

He was flying.

Hiccup gathered all the breath he could that he managed to regain after his long run and screamed his little lungs out. He grabbed the dragon's legs and kicked the air, crying out to try and get down. The dragon had to fold its ears back just to keep its senses stable â€“ loud noises had a way of disorienting dragons after all. Luckily, it managed to keep itself steady as it circled down and eventually reached the ground.

The second his feet touched the earth once again Hiccup wrenched himself from the dragon's grasp and ran off, tripping and soon crawling over to a large moss-covered rock and pressing himself against it. He panted heavily watching the dragon settle itself on the ground and cock its head at him.

The dragon was hoping that by saving the human from the fall, that would convince him it wasn't bad and they could start playing. But the human was obviously still afraid, and the dragon was pondering what else it could do now to show the boy he was a friendly dragon.

A small, growling churning sound came out of nowhere and startled them both. The little dragon jumped and crouched down with teeth angrily bared, wondering if it was some other dragon coming to pick a fight or take the human away. It raised its wings in a threatening manner to make itself seem larger and darted its head around. Hiccup

was both afraid and confused seeing the dragon before the sound came out again, along with a slight discomfort in his stomach. He held his hands to grab it and gulped before chuckling nervously.

"Umâ€¦ I guess I'm kinda hungry. Nothing like being chased by a dragon to build up an appetite." He muttered.

The dragon was quite surprised to find that the sound had come from the human, apparently because it needed food. To think he sounded just like a dragon, it could hardly tell the difference. The dragon returned to its upright position and looked around before spotting the nearby lake, galloping over to it with childlike fervor.

Approaching the lake it bent its head down and peered through the murky surface, watching for any sliver of movement. Its keen eyesight was able to look through the multiple layers of dirt whereas a human like Hiccup would only be able to see a few inches. Spotting a sliver of silver scales, it raised its paw slowly and waited, before slapping down on the surface and causing a small fish to jump out of the water with a splash. The fish flew in the air before descending, and was caught in the now-standing dragon's mouth in an instant.

Impressed as he was with the dragon's fishing skills, and for Hiccup that wasn't saying much since he could barely catch an old boot when his father took him on fishing trips, Hiccup was still apprehensive when it came waddling back on only its hind legs. Still, he had to admit, it did make the reptilian menace look somewhat adorable. It landed back on all fours right in front of him and dropped the slimy thing in his lap; he jumped at how close it had gotten.

Hiccup visibly winced in disgust over the dragon's present, while it just leaned back and sat on its haunches and watched. For a short moment they just looked at each other before the dragon decided the little boy might not understand what he was supposed to do. It visibly gulped and looked down in the fish, and it quickly dawned on Hiccup, though not without great discomfort. The dragon wanted him to eat the fish.

He picked it up and just stared at it for a moment. "Umâ€¦ I can't eat this. It's raw and I'll get sick."

The dragon cocked its head and looked down at the fish again before running off to grab a few sticks of wood. Clever as it was, it breathed with a small stream of fire, making Hiccup recoil back, and created a quaint little campfire.

Hiccup just watched the bright flames crackle and burn away at the wood and the sparks float into the air, while the dragon was looking at him expectantly once again. Did this dragon understand what it said and made this fire for him? But his father said that dragons were mindless, selfish animals; how could such a creature comprehend what he had just said? Regardless of the answer, the dragon did make a nice fire to keep him warm and cook his fish â€“ he might as well keep it from going to waste.

Taking a nearby stick, he drove it through the fish and held it over the fire, waiting a few moments before the saliva had evaporated and it had blackened. He brought it back and took a small bite out of it,

getting a rise from the dragon's ear flaps, humming in satisfaction while he chewed. All the while the dragon just watched, even as he set the fish back down on his lap and just stared at it for a few moments. Then the boy did something rather unexpectedâ€¦ he held the stick out towards the dragon.

"I'm fullâ€¦ y-you can have the rest." Hiccup said, a worried tremble in his voice, but not as much as before.

The dragon just looked at the fish for a moment, and then began to inch forward, tilting his head and opening his maw, letting Hiccup see his tiny little toothless gums. The dragon gave a small mew and closed its mouth slowly upon the fish so as not to startle the boy, pulled back and sat down again, chewing on the fish as he did before swallowing.

Hiccup just stared in amazement. "You don't have any teeth? You're toothless?"

The little dragon swallowed its meal, apparently not paying any attention to Hiccup's question; it just enjoyed the flavor of their shared meal. It licked its mouth to capture any remnants of the taste and watched as Hiccup rubbed his stomach and let loose a small smile. They then just returned to watching each other in peaceful silence.

Hiccup couldn't help but notice that little by little, his fear of the creature was slowly dissipating. They had been here for probably half an hour by now, and yet the dragon had done nothing to harm him. The exact opposite really, it made a toasty fire for him to get warm with and brought him fish when it noticed he was hungry, they even shared a meal together!

It didn't make any sense to Hiccup, seeing that the monster that his people had warned him about ever since the day he was born, one of the demons that his people mercilessly slaughtered so as to end their greed, was being so gentle and kind. Really, it was acting kinder than most people he knew, and this was a creature that supposedly had no sense of heart or conscience. But if what the warriors and his father had been telling him was wrong, then Hiccup could only wonder just what it was that was sitting in front of him.

Leaving such heavy thoughts aside, Hiccup turned away and looked to the stick in his hand, and had an idea. He stood up and walked away to sit on a nearby rock, and used the stick to draw in the dirt. Hiccup had always been good at drawing, even when he was very young he drew beautiful pictures of everything he could find: the Great Hall, the houses, the trees, the ocean, the mountain in the distance of the island and the sea stacks surrounding it. His father never had the time to look at his pictures, which always made Hiccup sad, but never for very long. Drawing was always a way for him to take his mind off of things, just as it was now as he lost himself in moving the stick through the earth and forming the picture.

Another stick collided with his just as he was completing a line, and he turned to see the dragon, a large stick about Hiccup's length in its mouth. The dragon had been watching him from over his shoulder as he drew, and was amazed at the human's seemingly magical ability to form pictures in the earth. It seemed simple enough, so it decided to try. Hiccup just looked at the dragon cooing and purring before

turning back to his picture, and was surprised to see that he had actually drawn the dragon's image. Even while unfocused, the dragon was the only thing on his mind.

He looked up again to see the dragon hopping and prancing around with the stick, plowing the earth to make its own pictures. Hiccup thought it looked fun so he decided to join in, sticking his own stick back in the dirt and running around. The two went round and round in an innocent, childlike dance, skipping and twirling, mewling, and Hiccup was even laughing.

The lines were weaved over and over, parallel and across, they squiggled and darted, looped and circled. The two went on and on, until finally they collided into each other's backs and fell to the ground; they could not see it, but their subconscious minds had struck again. Though the picture was sloppy, from a higher view it appeared as a rough image of Hiccup and the dragon together.

Hiccup turned back around to see the dragon staring at him once more, but this time he could see the dragon's perfect round pupils. The sweetness in its gaze and the warm and gentle spirit it reflected, but something else as well, somethingâ€¦ sad. He could swear it looked so familiar, and after a moment, he realized why. It was a look of loneliness, much like the loneliness he carried inside him â€“ this little dragon must have been all alone, with no one to help or look after him. That was why the dragon followed him, that was why it was so nice; all it wanted was a friend.

And really, wasn't he the same? Realizing that, the dragon disappeared in his mind's eye, and it was as if Hiccup was looking into a mirror, seeing a perfect reflection of himself, more than just an image, but all his fears, all his thoughts, all he was, and all he wanted. It was almost frightening, seeing your true self like that, but Hiccup figured that maybe the dragon's open nature was a sign that it had seen the same in him, and suddenly, he didn't feel so alone.

Hiccup picked himself up and kneeled from the ground and stared right into the dragon's eyes, a million unspoken words being passed both within and between. A leap of faith, Hiccup heard in his mind, take a chance, and without any recognition into his actions, he raised a hand out to the dragon. The dragon's breath came out strong through its tiny nostrils, Hiccup could feel the warm air in between his fingers. Here he was, placing blind trust in a dragon not to bite his hand off, and it was quickly becoming too much to bear, and so he turned his head away.

The dragon watched and saw what Hiccup did, and knew this was the chance it had been waiting for. Without a sound, it bridged the gap, placing its snout, right into Hiccup's tiny hand.

A moment of pure transcendence between two souls of two different races â€“ a multiverse of words _and_ emotions carried between. Two beings that knew nothing of war or hatred or violence had risen above it all, the darkness carried in the spirits of both their races, with eyes opened to what lied beyond the surface. Perfect understanding and pure trust passed through in such a simple gesture; a connection had been made, and those two souls that so flawlessly mirrored each otherâ€¦ had become one. Looking back on it from years ahead, they would never have known that that one moment would lead to the start

of a greater destiny than anyone could ever imagine.

But for now, they could simply take in the purity and power of the moment they and their hearts touched one another. Hiccup looked back to the dragon with its snout still in his handâ€¦ and he smiled.

The dragon pulled back and opened its eye to look at the boy who was finally his friend, and peered curiously at his gesture. Then, slowly, the corners of its mouth began to tilt up, its mouth opening up ever so slightly, more and more. Hiccup just watched as the dragon mimicked his smile with what looked to be a smile of its own. And his only grew larger and brighter.

He then burst into a fit of giggles. "Wow, you're smiling!" The dragon barked cheerfully, his mouth showing less signs of strain and the smile becoming more natural.

Hiccup calmed himself down enough to look into its mouth again, once more taking notice of its lack of teeth. "So you really don't have any teeth?" He asked.

The dragon looked down into its own mouth, and in an instant, a set of sharp white teeth jutted out from its gums. Small though they were, Hiccup still had to jump when he saw them, landing on his hands a few inches back. The dragon quickly returned the teeth to its mouth and trotted over to Hiccup to see if he was alright, asking as such in a quiet high-pitched croon and a nudge to the shoulder. Hiccup just giggled more at the surprise.

"So you do have teeth! And here I thought you were toothlessâ€¦" Hiccup had a thought then. "Hey, how 'bout if I call you 'Toothless?'"

The little dragon â€“ Toothless â€“ let out a purr of agreement at his new name, and Hiccup gave a giggle and a small pet on his snout. So it would be thenâ€¦ Hiccup and Toothless.

* * *

><p>Review, favorite, follow. I'm sorry this new chapter took a while. I don't really know how often I'll be able to keep the updates up. Maybe once a week, probably around Saturday. I've got a lot on my plate right now, and writing a new 5000+ word chapter constantly on top of all that is pretty taxing. But I will try and get these in as soon as I can!

4. Chapter 4

All right, this one was a bit tricky, but I managed to get it in. I hope you guys like the HicTooth fluff I put in - mark my words there is gonna be a lot of that in this story. People just really love the HicTooth fluff. I'm thinking nw, until further notice, I will submit a new chapter every Saturday, and with Thanksgiving break coming up, I should have plenty of time to work on the next chapter, so stay tuned.

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* * *

><p>The sun bled and shone through the needles and leaves of the trees from above, the light turning redder and redder from the waning day, shadows growing longer and stretching out across the ground in tandem. A symphony of nature resounded all around them, from the flowing water to the birds chirping and insects buzzing, to the blowing wind in the area.<p>

An hour or two had passed since the cove's only current inhabitants had met and bonded, spent mostly through frivolous play. Games of tag, swimming or splashing in the pond, or hopscotch along the rocks without touching the ground, whatever came into Hiccup's mind. By now all their energies had been spent, and their tuckered out bodies now lay on the ground peacefully asleep.

Hiccup was sprawled out on the grass, breathing softly with his mouth open and his eyes closed, the soft bed beneath him more comfortable than his normal wooden plank one back at his house. Toothless was draped over him like a black scaly blanket, his right wing stretched out, tail wrapped around Hiccup's feet, head atop his little chest and paws wrapped around him like a stuffed animal in a child's grasp. His small purrs filled Hiccup's head with sweetened thoughts of their games stretching out into the wee hours, as fun and exciting as those from moments earlier. They were in a different realm where they were the only ones that existed, wearing smiles brighter than stars and able to carry on with their play for all eternity, undisturbed by outside forces.

One force though would not be denied, it shook the earth and sky of their little dream world, a noise as loud as thunder. It sounded out with a loud, resounding "HICCUP!"

The dream shattered and Hiccup's eyes snapped open, wide as saucer plates; he let loose a sharp yelp and a shuddering gasp from his sudden awakening. Bolting upright, he disturbed Toothless, the dragon rolling away onto the grass and shaking his own head. The cry sounded out once more, startling Toothless into a fully alert state; he ran over to Hiccup and curled his tail around his human friend in a protective manner, growling at the as of yet unseen foe.

"HICCUP, GET OUT HERE RIGHT NOW!"

Hiccup flinched at the voice, his clear mind now recognizing who it belonged to. With a sigh, he raised himself up and placed a hand onto Toothless's side, looking at the dragon with dejected eyes.

"That's my daddy. He's probably looking for meâ€¦" He mumbled.

He felt he should have been relieved to hear the voice of his father calling out to him, a clear sign that he was concerned and had dropped all his taxing demands as chieftain to search for him. A chance that perhaps he was willing to forego that face and voice of anger and shame that had become so terrifying and yet recently so common. However, hearing his father's tone and recalling everything that had occurred right before he went into the forest, he found he was more saddened than anything else. Playing with Toothless had given him a perfect escape from all the stress and angst just now beginning to appear in his relationships with everyone, but it had to end eventually, Hiccup knew.

His father was quickly becoming impatient, he also realized; a minute or two longer and he would most likely start ripping trees out of the ground. Hiccup figured it probably was time to leave anyway, even if he had his doubts that the village truly missed him or even noticed his absence, and so looked around to find an exit from the cove. He spotted one in between two of the large rock walls, just thin enough for someone like him to effortlessly squeeze through.

He started to make his way over to the exit, but found himself stopped dead in his tracks, his green tunic yanked from behind him. He looked back to see Toothless with tunic in his mouth, eyes pleading and whimpering like a dog that had lost its favorite bone or toy. The sight was enough to make anyone, especially Hiccup, break down, but Odin only knew what would happen if his father found a dragon with his son. The numerous statues and sculptures of mutilated dragons around Berk gave him a pretty clear idea
though.

"Toothlessâ€¦" He groaned and grunted while trying to yank his shirt out of the dragon's mouth. "Let go! I have to go back now!" The keyword was '_had'_ â€“ truthfully he didn't want to leave any more than Toothless wanted to see him go.

Toothless just whimpered more, even began to growl, and shook his head while clamping onto the woven shirt harder. The concept of fathers and the necessity of departure was completely lost on the little dragon â€“ all he knew was that his boy â€“ he was referring to the little human as _his_ boy now â€“ was going away. For a brief moment the dragon was flooded with fear that somewhere in their chain of games he had probably done something to upset him, but with that smile Hiccup wore the whole time for the life of him he couldn't understand what.

Unlike the majority of his kind, he was simply naÃ¯ve towards deceitful natures held by most humans. He figured it might have had something to do with the voice calling out; he was more than convinced it was something bad now to make his boy possibly not like him anymore and want to leave.

"Stop it, Toothless! My dad'sâ€¦ callingâ€¦ I need to go
home!"

Hiccup tugged on his tunic repeatedly to try and pry it out of Toothless's jaw, but still the dragon held firm. Their game of tug-of war just went on, neither side giving an inch, Hiccup attributing his new friend's behavior to sheer stubbornness. Back and forth, back and forth, neither of the two even noticed that the fabric was starting to give out and tear.

Finally, it ripped, sending both younglings fling back, Hiccup colliding on the ground with a good piece of his tunic torn away, Toothless still holding the torn piece in his mouth. The dragon immediately rushed up to check and see if Hiccup was okay, nudging his shoulder and sniffing and whimpering softly. Hiccup picked himself up to gaze into his worried eyes and reached out a hand to pet him on the head.

"Toothless, please. I have to go home." He repeated once again. "But I promise, I'll come back. I'll find a way to sneak out and we can play all day."

That response seemed to instill some manner of confidence into his little friend, because his stance had shifted somewhat to a more relaxed position. Still, his pleading look demanded some confirmation of that. Hiccup could recognize that: that need to know if friendship, especially a newly formed one, could weather obstacles such as separation and survive. Unseen forces beyond the control of the children they were had been what pulled him and Astrid apart, though she seemed content to be guided in their direction.

She was on the verge of cutting off all ties with him for the sake of a future she was ready to throw everything considered trivial away for, and seemed to have the perfect justification for it. It had shaken him to the core to see that she could turn her back on him so easily, but Toothless wasn't like her; having touched in body and soul, Hiccup could beyond any doubt consider him a true friend.

"I promiseâ€¦ Toothless."

He just held the gaze for as long as he could, hearing Toothless's panicked breathing eventually settle down into a calm purr. He pulled away and gave Hiccup a small lick to the face, Hiccup laughing at the feel of his slimy tongue. He grabbed Toothless's head and neck and gave him a brief hug before breaking loose and headed for the break in the rock.

"Bye, Toothless! I'll see youâ€¦ tomorrow!" He waved as he ran.

The dragon barked back as he waited there, wagging his tail and licking his lips. All it would take was a day, and he would see Hiccup again.

* * *

><p>Hiccup ran through the woods, wracking his short-term memory through all the excitement of playing with Toothless to remember the path through the cove. He tried his best to think on his feet while just traversing through the path, hoping the right way would present itself. Bushes and sticks cracked along the ground, grass fluttered in the breeze created by the rush of his little body, and low hanging branches were swept away in his wake. He made it past the big rock where he first found Toothless and hopped over the old rotting log, just trying to get as far as possible from the cove in the hope his father wouldn't track down his path to the cove where Toothless was.<p>

Dashing through, he spotted something over in the distance at the corner of his eye, and backtracked to get a closer look. A large group of masses, traveling together, in hues of greens, grays, and browns far into the forest's dense ranks of trees and shrubbery. Hiccup could identify the lead one as his father by the red beard and slightly larger size compared to the others that helped him earn his name.

Judging by the others with him, it would seem that he had organized a full search party to hunt the little escapee down. Hiccup grimaced at the sight of the men armed with their sharpest and heaviest battle-axes and swords, barely even able to picture the bloodbath that might have occurred should they have found him moments before in the cove.

Hiccup crossed the distance from his path to theirs, swerving past the trees in between to intercept the group. The multitude of branches and pine needles barely allowed any sunlight to get through, leaving the path cloaked in a shadow that darkened the ground and hid various rocks and fallen pinecones from his sight. He had actually stubbed his toes on a few of the wayward stones, but managed to overall traverse through the trees safely.

"Daddy!" Hiccup cried from inside the trees, alerting the Vikings to raise their weapons in response.

Hiccup emerged from the low hanging branches, feeling his skin itch from the needles that had managed to stick to his cloak and irritated his sensitive skin underneath. He nearly fell back in shock upon seeing all of the men with their weapons up looking as if ready to attack him. But Stoick had managed to snap out of his battle-ready state and rather harshly grabbed Hiccup by the arm and pull him forward.

"Hiccup! What do you think you're doing!? How many times have I warned you never to go into the forest by yourself!?" He angrily yelled.

The boy was left terrified by his father's angry tone and grip as tight as a vice, ready to crush his arm at any moment. One thing that struck him though was that he didn't even bother to ask if he was alright, he had just gone straight into reprimanding him. There wasn't even a hint of concern in his features, just a glare strong enough to spook a bear into fleeing that spoke of how he was ready to deal punishment regardless of who found who first.

"I-I-I was j-justâ€¦" Hiccup stuttered, unable to form a single word in the face of his father's intimidating stature.

"I give you a single, simple order and you don't listen! Time 'n time again I've spoken of these woods being no place for children! If Astrid hadn't told me about your runnin' off, you would have been some wild animal's aftarnoon snack by the time I got here!"

"A pret'y ligh' aftarnoon snackâ€¦" chimed in Gobber, who was standing right behind Stoick and twirling his braided moustache. A glare from Stoick shut the crippled smith right up.

He turned back to Hiccup and if it were even possible, his angered look doubled in intensity. "Are you tryin' ta make me look foolish? First that contraption and now this, gallavantin' off into unknown territory?"

"B-but, daddy-"

"This is no way for the heir of Berk ta act! I hope at tha' very least you have a good explanation for disobeyin me!" He let go of Hiccup and crossed his arms in an impatient manner, staring down at the boy like a giant would an insect. His large size cast a shadow that caged Hiccup within its radius, freezing him to the spot where he stood. "Well, out with it, boy!"

Hiccup fidgeted in place, looking down at the ground and overall doing his best not to look the fiery-haired and tempered chief right

in the eye. He figured it might be pointless, but he might as well try. "W-Well, S-Snotlout and the othersâ€¦ um, they wereâ€¦ they were b-bullying meâ€¦ andâ€¦"

A normal father who had a greater sense of care for their child would have stopped everything and asked for more information, and said he would have a talk with the parents of the bully in question. Stoick however, who only saw the cowering child in front of him as another immature youth of his tribe rather than the son he was, only scoffed, rolled his eyes and shook his head. Not even the mention of bullying or his child's suffering could have triggered the small scraps of fatherly instinct within him.

"Enough, Hiccup! Don' go blaming others for your insubordination - I will not accept such shameful actions!" He held out a hand towards the boy in signal to halt before bending down and jabbing him with a finger to the chest, making the boy fall over. "You have a great responsibility to the people, you're going to be chief of this tribe one day!" He scolded. "How do you expect ta be a proper leader, rally warriors and give direction when ya cannae even follow those that have been given to you?"

He would have put it past the young boy, but Hiccup was thinking about the whole 'succession to chief' thing for a long time now. Of course he had decided from the very beginning that he didn't really want to be a chief. Sure he said that he was going to be chief one day to people, but that was so he could hold on to what little respect people carried for him. He had left silent any personal feelings on the matter long ago figuring that he would have had little choice in the matter, any complaints he would utter falling on deaf ears. He couldn't imagine himself organizing repairs and hunting trips, issuing decrees for new laws, being stuck in stuffy rooms for war meetings, and overall maintaining stability in a village of rowdy, rude, and brutish Vikings faced with an ongoing centuries old war. Besides, it's not like anyone would listen to him or give him any quarter as a leader anyway â€“ not even of age yet and he could hear whisperings of who else might be qualified for the job.

"I-I'm sorry, dadâ€¦" Hiccup whimpered, his affectionate spin of 'daddy' now officially tossed out to sea. He didn't have room to be a child now, not when so many were breathing down his neck and expecting so much of him.

Sighing heavily, Stoick grabbed Hiccup by the collar of his tunic and was ready to pass him off to Gobber when he noticed the huge tear in the back. His eyes widened and annoyance came back in full swing. Shaking Hiccup with a violent jerk, he shouted again. "What is this!? What happened to yur tunic!"

Hiccup gulped, not sure what he should tell his father; a single word of Toothless and his father would ground him for eternity. What's worse, Toothless might end up a pelt on the floor or a blanket for some thuggish child like Snotlout once he tracked him down and drove a sword through his head. He could say some wild animal chewed it up, but that was more than likely to get Stoick even madder as it would only have proved his point on the dangers of the woods. Thinking quickly, he responded.

"Uh, uhâ€¦ I-I-I was just, um, playing, and uhâ€¦ my tunic got caught, onâ€¦ a branch. Really got stuck thereâ€¦ and-and I, and I

tugged, and it justâ€¦ um, err, tore off. My favorite tunic, totally ruined, just like that. I-I mean, the seamstress put a lot of effort into it, it was just so woolly and soft, and it was my favorite color andâ€¦" he rambled on and on, a tendency of his whenever he got nervous or when he tried to lie and failed miserably.

"Tha huge tearâ€¦ came from a branch?" Gobber asked skeptically, his eyebrow raised and his hook pointed straight at him.

"I-It wasâ€¦ a really pointy branch?" He questioned more than answered. By now it should have been obvious, even to the densest Viking on the island that he was lying.

But his father seemed too exhausted and annoyed to really care; he just rubbed a hand to his face to wipe the fatigue his unruly son gave away. "Justâ€¦ forget it. Gobber, take him back to the house." He passed the boy off, who was recaptured by the smith's hook. "From now on, he's not ta leave the house except ta go to the forge, an' I want an escort with him at all times when he does."

"An' where're you going ta be?" Gobber asked.

"Preparing the ships â€“ we're settin' sail for the nest." Hiccup's eyes fell down to the ground again and his face saddened. His father had been hunting for the dragon's nest ever since he was born, each search more fruitless than the last. He would spend days gathering crews and loading weapons onto their armed boats only to lose them all once they sailed into the bogs of Helheim's Gate and come out with almost as many singes and cracks on their vessels as hairs in their beards.

But however many failures he experienced only seemed to push him further in his pursuit to destroy it and drive the dragons away to find a new nest. Results aside, the trips had cause him to spend long months away from home, and they had occurred with such frequency that Hiccup had started to think there was more to it than his desire to free Berk of the 'devils' menace.'

"Shoulda known tha' was comingâ€¦" Gobber said. "Right, come on, ya lit'l fishbone. Off we go." He started to make way back to the village with Hiccup in tow, passing the other men who all had tired looks on their faces and slouched postures, hefting their weapons on their shoulders or hanging limply from their sides.

Hiccup turned back to his father one last time, not sure what he wanted to say but just feeling he needed to say something. Whether to perhaps advise him against searching for the dragon's nest or to try telling him about Snotlout again, it simply started as "But, dad-"

"I said no excuses! I am very disappointed in you, Hiccup; it's about time you stopped these childish games and learn ta grow up!" That was all Stoick said as he trudged ahead, not even sparing his hurting son a second glance.

As soon as he was ahead, he just gave yet another heavy sigh, slowing his pace and letting fatigue sink in. Beyond anyone else's opinion, he was perfectly aware that that may not have been the best way to handle the situation. He remembered how his own father had been a bit fairer whenever he had gotten in trouble, but those moments were few

and far between. Stoick had always been a model son and obeyed his father without question, even when his father ordered him to bang his head against rocks or punch through trees and jump off cliffs to help him see a viking's true strength.

Whenever he asked the same of Hiccup, he had always been met with rebellion, his son slapping logic in the face of his claims. He imagined how his dead wife Valka, who was less taken to violence than most others in Berk would have handled the situation with a more gentle touch and a calmer demeanor. She had always been better at this sort of thing, talking to and comforting children, and would have all the time to do it being expected to stay home with Hiccup were she still alive.

But he couldn't think of 'what ifs' or 'how would they do its' now; he was on his own, a single father who had admittedly something of a problem child, and had to figure things out for himself in the midst of trying to keep a whole village together. He was trying to protect him, prepare him for his future, and if that included overly strict discipline to ensure Hiccup wouldn't repeat his many mistakes, so be it.

* * *

><p>The last rays of the sun were disappearing over the horizon by the time the group had made it back to the village, casting the island into the early moments of dusk and turning the vibrant blues of the sea to a near black. The first torches were already being lit up on the front of the houses, being carried around by men who were still carrying out last-minute duties, or up on the high beams that would allow clear searches of the night sky for any possible dragon attacks. Each of these individual flames dotted throughout lighted the path back down to their destination, the chief's house on the hill.<p>

The other men had already returned to their homes the second they had passed the forest's edge back into Berk. Children and women were coming inside after a hard day's work, while Stoick was on his way to the Great Hall to spend another long night making preparations for the new hunt. Hiccup let out another sigh; obviously that meant his father wouldn't be around to wish him goodnight. Not that he ever did, really.

His father's indifference towards him was as cold as the biting evening wind that no longer had the daylight heat to warm its touch and seeped into his open ended tunic and chilled his skin. Every day, it was one excuse or another to make sure they didn't spend any time together, either he had somewhere to go or he made sure that Hiccup did, always falling back on the old 'a chief's duty is to his people' rant.

It was the same as Astrid: everywhere he went people were coming up with whatever reason they could to avoid him. It was an ongoing crusade in the minds of the villagers to ensure that they saw as little of the boy as possible throughout the day. In the back of his mind, Hiccup questioned why it was such a big deal that he went missing into the woods if this was true. It certainly wasn't like anyone would miss him if he was gone.

And looking around, that very well seemed to be the case. They passed

several people on their way over, and not one of them even bothered to make eye contact with him. No one even noticed or cared that he had gone missing, and he was supposed to be the heir. The most important boy in their village, supposedly and he wasn't even worth their time, it seemed. It was enough to place dark thoughts into the child's mindâ€¦

â€¦Which weren't made any better when a rugged Viking built as well as his father trudged up. His uncle and Snotlout's father, Spitelout. His heavy footsteps had managed to catch the attention of Gobber, who was still dangling Hiccup by his collar. With a limping turn, he faced the approaching second-in-command.

"Ah, evenin', Spitelout." Gobber greeted.

"I see you've managed ta catch our lit'l runaway." Spitelout said, always the type to get down to business.

Gobber only scowled slightly at his response. Sure, children weren't his most favorite people in the world, but he always had a particular distaste for Spitelout's harsher than necessary attitude toward them. He had always been one to care more about glory and achievement than things that really mattered like family. A good look at the mantle above his house's fireplace was proof of how he tended to favor stoking the fires of his ego, the wood littered with nothing but medals and trophies from wins in his youth. It was already clear from earlier today that his pompous attitude had passed onto his son, and in Gobber's opinion, the only thing worse than one Spitelout was one and a half Spitelouts.

"Yeah, gutsy, ain't 'e? Headin' out inta the woodsâ€¦" Gobber mused, hoping to bolster Hiccup's status.

"Valor and carelessness are two very different things, Gobber." Spitelout said crossing his arms. "But nevar mind tha', why don' you let me take the lad home? I'm sure you've plenty o' things to take care of over at tha' forgeâ€¦"

If there was one word that summed up Gobber's expression at that moment, it was suspicion. Spitelout hardly showed generosity to anyone. Just the opposite, as opposed to Stoick, Spitelout was more harsh and demanding, a man who expected perfection from everyone. Stoick believed in a sense of community, whereas Spitelout insisted that everyone carry their own weight and solve issues by themselves. No way would he willingly lend a helping hand unless there was some ulterior motive, not that he was all that proud of that kind of shifty attitude.

"Migh'y kind o' ya, worryin' as tha' is, but s'not a problem." He said. "Chief's orders, get him home an' make sure he stays there."

"Oh, but tha' doesn't haf'ta mean you, necessarily." Spitelout argued.

"You know yur brother â€“ man 'o few words. Pretty sure it's implied."

"Oh, I do know ma brother, and he'd want everyone in their proper place fulfillin' their duties."

"I think a' can handle getting' a seven year old to his house." Gobber deadpanned. Hiccup meanwhile, just watched his mentor trade banter with his uncle, preferring to keep his eyes on the former.

"Like you could handle keepin him in the forge doin' his job?" Spitelout countered, earning a heated glare from Gobber. "Look, all I'm sayin' is tha' it's important we're where we're needed most. The raids come whenever they will, and we need tae be prepared tae defend our stores and homes at a moment's notice â€“ you wouldnae want a man ta fall just because they were ill-prepared, would you?"

As much as he hated to admit it, Spitelout did have a point; they needed proper weapons to fight, and Gobber was the one who handled all weapon creation and repair. Though they could boast that they did, Vikings couldn't just go into battle armed with kitchen utensils or any other kind of metal. They needed blades sharp enough to split hairs and sturdy enough to remain pristine even after they had hacked into 100 dragons each. With a heavy sigh, Gobber handed Hiccup over to Spitelout, and started to hobble off to the forge to finish his day's work, tuning to look at the two from the corner of his eye.

"You jest watch yerself." He simply stated.

Spitelout, who held Hiccup, again by the scruff of his tunic, gave a sly grin. "Let's nae be too rough on the lad."

"I was talkin' tae you." Gobber said, and with that he headed down to the forge.

Spitelout, meanwhile, had let his grin fade away completely, replacing it with a dark scowl of disgust as he carried Hiccup through the village and back to his home. Hiccup kept his head down the whole way, something inside him telling him to avoid the gaze of the larger man as much as he could. He had tried to speak with his uncle several times along the way, whether about Snotlout or daily things around the village, but barely any sounds could escape his throat when he defied his better judgment and glanced up at his uncle's face. It suddenly felt twice as cold as they walked up the stone steps that lead to the Haddock household on the hill, stopping at the front door.

As soon as Spitelout carelessly dropped Hiccup on the floor, the boy landing less than gracefully on his rear, he was ready to turn back. He was stopped, however, by a hastily blurted out. "Wait!"

He turned back to see Hiccup at the doorstep, fidgeting in place with his hands right behind his back. Such a sight only left Spitelout more disgusted with the boy than he already was, a posture such as that completely unbecoming for a Viking. Everything about the boy screamed weakness, a trait he could not accept in any member of his tribe, and he took satisfaction in the knowledge that he wasn't alone.

Hiccup, after a few seconds, finally worked up the nerve to finish his statement. "Um, thanksâ€¦ f-for bringing me homeâ€¦"

Spitelout only stood there and glared daggers at the boy, causing him

to flinch even more. "Y-You didn't have to do thatâ€¦ I-I mean, go toâ€¦ to all that troubleâ€¦"

"No, I shouldn't haveâ€¦"

Hiccup dared to glance up and meet the icy cold stare of his unforgiving uncle. "No one should havtae waste their time on a useless weaklin' like you. You're a disgrace to all of Berk, all Vikings everywhere, and it shames us tae no end to be saddled with you as an heir."

It hurt, it hurt to hear those words, the most painful words he had heard both today and in a long while. They hurt more than anything Astrid, Snotlout, or his father could say, because while they only danced around the subject, here his uncle was saying it as clear and blunt as possible. A thousand axes had cut right through his heart at that moment, pressing down on the blades so the blood would pour out like a waterfall. With each step his uncle took towards him, the blade pressed further in, until he bended down and whispered in as low a tone as he could possibly muster.

"You don't belong here."

And with that he stomped off, leaving Hiccup to stand there in devastated silence. A good five minutes of staring out at empty space had passed before he finally shut the door.

Hiccup just quietly steeped up the stairs of his dark, empty home up to his room and hopped into his hard bed without bothering to change into a new tunic, wrapping himself as tightly as possible with the blankets. All he wanted to do was drift to sleep and hopefully drown out the horrible memories of today, of all the misery he went through at the hands of people he thought he could trust.

He only wanted to remember the good memories, all of which involved that little black dragon probably still waiting there in that cove in the woods. He just wanted to lose himself in the happy moments of playing with Toothless, eating with Toothless, napping with Toothless, and the promise to see Toothless again. Forcing his brain to focus on those memories alone, not allowing even a half-second to recall the scolding, abusive voices of his 'people,' he eventually wore himself out and fell into a deep sleep.

He had expected, in his subconscious mind, to dream of big adventures he would have with Toothless. He had thought of the two of them sailing the seas on a big ship, navigating through the waves and staring out across the horizon. He thought of them climbing up the huge mountain on the side of the island, and looking down on the world once they had reached the top. He dreamed of every possible adventure he could have with Toothless, big or small, land or sea.

He didn't expect the inexplicable images that popped into his mind, hazy visions that gave such a sense of foreboding.

A man dressed in armor as black as night, wielding swords resembling dragon wings that burned with purple fire on the back of a large black dragon.

_The two flying through a kingdom of large buildings, ancient in

appearance, beneath a heavily overcast sky._

A dragon the size of a mountain, breathing massive torrents of fire that could melt rock to nothing.

The flames turning to surges of ocean water that froze upon impact, from the mouth of a just as massive black dragon that locked its mighty tusks with another of its kind, colored white.

Skeletal draconic creatures with hides of blackened mist filling the sky, some large enough to carry bone-like castle structures upon their backs, commanded by an intimidating man with scars littering his face, a metal arm, and a large hooked staff

The rider and dragon turning into a streak of blue light with a black outline that zipped through multiple ships at lighting speed and decimated them in terrible explosions before bursting into the sky.

A flash of light.

And in front of him, a strange sword with strings along the blade and switches upon the hilt. He grasped it with a single hand, and the blade came alight with flame.

Hiccup suddenly gasped and awoke, sitting upright in his bed with sweat pouring down his tiny, freckled cheeks. He gripped the blanket as tight as he could, his mind littered with confusion over the strange dream. Could he even call it a dream? Well, whatever it was, out of his bafflement, he knew one thing for certain.

He had to see Toothless again.

* * *

><p>Sorry if everybody is coming off a bit harsh to poor little Hiccup, but there is a purpose for all of it. As for the dream sequence, there's a thing with that. It was written to give you guys a preview of what's to come in future chapters. Give you guys a chance to test the waters, so to speak. If you like how it's sounding, then as I always say: review, favorite, follow! If you're already along for the ride, hope you stay on!

5. Chapter 5

A hundred and twelve, count 'em, a hundred and twelve followers already! Wow, I am just blown away by this, just chapter five and this story has reached such a milestone already. And we haven't even gotten to the juicy stuff. I am so glad that so many of you have fallen in love with this story already, and I'm also thankful for your suggestions for the story. I won't make any major changes, but there are a couple of things I'm taking into consideration.

**I'd also like to say thanks The StarsShadow15 for his kind words. I find I have similar tastes in comparison to my writing style â€“ I'll be honest, bad spelling and grammar are one of the biggest turn-offs for me in a fic. I'll stick with it if I like the story, but it is a real pet peeve for me. Sparse details, on the other hand, I'll live with, for me it's still all a matter of where the story's

going.**

Anyway, enough of my two cents, here's the next chapter, enjoy!

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* * *

><p>Hiccup awoke to greet the next day with mixed emotions: to forget about the joy and misery of yesterday and to face those of today as well. He stifled a yawn and climbed out of bed, pulling away the covers and quickly setting the blanket back neatly. Giving his back a stretch from hours of sleeping on the hard wood, he remembered based on the touch of exposed skin that he was still in the tunic Toothless had torn from yesterday in his franticness to keep him in the cove.<p>

He walked over, lazily rubbing an eye to the closet and grabbed his stool to reach up to the tunics hung up on the shelf. Hiccup mentally chided himself for being as short as he was as he strained with clenched eyes and gritted teeth with a hand on the wood wall to reach even a single sleeve. He managed to lock two fingers around a small bit of one and pulled it down, but not without all the others falling on top of him in a large pile. His scruffily haired head popping up, he made a reminder to himself to reorganize later â€“ he might as well or he'd just be giving his father one more reason to scold him.

And that, unfortunately, was the first thing that popped into Hiccup's mind: the scolding, the insults, and worst of all, the horrible things his uncle Spitelout had said to him yesterday. The stuff about being a disgrace and shame, how no one should have to waste their time on him and all that other junk. Hiccup sadly couldn't help but feel there to be truth in those last few words he said: that he didn't belong here.

What was he, truthfully, next to practically every other person, every able-bodied being capable of feats of strength and daring that inspired envy in all lesser men? The way, as his father said, Vikings could control the shifting tides and roaring waves of the seas, the way they could shape and break the earth and rip the trees from their seats in the ground. And here he was, someone who could barely even reach up to get a fresh tunic off a shelf in his closet without causing a mess. He felt that he probably deserved all those insults and glares everyone sent his way; that they had every right to treat him the way he did.

They called him 'Hiccup' as tradition stared was normal for referring to the runt of the litter, like they did with some baby animals, lambs or yaks born small and weak like him. A hiccup was a small sound people make when they didn't mean to after they had eaten to fast. A 'hiccup' was an accident made by people who had gotten their hopes up, like him.

With these depressing thoughts now bouncing through his head he made his way out of the room and trudged down the stairs to the dining table by the fireplace. The fire was lit, but the table was completely bare, missing any kind of food or drink. His father had either gotten out early to continue his preparations for the next

nest hunt and forgotten to make breakfast or had stayed up at the Hall all night and never come home. Based on the fresh kindling on the flame it was more than likely the former. Either way, it was the same result as it seemed to be for many days in recent times, Hiccup had a whole house all to himself.

Like it mattered, though: his father's idea of cooking was to put a raw fish on the table and expect Hiccup to cook it himself, only to yank it away for any tiny little thing he got wrong and end up burning it over the fire. Hiccup would always force himself to eat even when the fish would be burned pitch black, while his father would stop caring entirely after just slapping it on the plate.

He wasn't really hungry anyway, just walking over to the cupboard and taking out a day-old loaf of bread and some jelly to smear it with. A cup of yak's milk from the barrel by the stairs, thank gods he didn't get it mixed up with the one full of mead, and his simple little meal was complete.

Taking a knife from the drawer, Odin forbid him being allowed to do that on his own, he bitterly though, he smeared the jelly on his bread. He applied a bit too much force, though, and a small splotch of it ended up on the table, splattered out. Groaning at yet another mess of his creation, he rushed back into the kitchen and grabbed a cloth to wipe the mess with. Taking the cloth and preparing to wipe, his hand stopped suddenly when he caught sight of the somehow familiar shape of the splotch. A triangular shape with two points sticking out near the top. A small smile appeared on his face while in its place in his eye a black, scaly face with big green eyes with bigger pupils stared back at him.

Toothless, that was the one good thing to happen to him all day yesterday, the dragon that he was so willing to call friend. Everything he had been taught since birth had told him that this was wrong in every possible way â€“ Vikings and dragons were supposed to fight each other, not share meals and draw in the dirt.

Then again, he was no ordinary Viking, and Toothless was hardly any ordinary dragon, at least not like the ones that stole their food and killed all the time. Their outer shells hid beneath them two kindred spirits that were lost and had found acceptance and love in each other. He had a true friend, what did it matter what he was or what he looked like?

Then it occurred to him, he had never really seen any kind of dragon like Toothless before, one covered black from head to toe and could retract his teeth at will. His wings seemed pretty big, and the shot he used to light that fire was unlike anything the boy had seen. Most dragons he knew of, the common variety that appeared around Berk, came in a great variety of vibrant and exotic colors and shapes with numerous abilities. And their fangs and claws, much to the chagrin of the Berkians, stayed out at all times for all to see and experience for themselves. At least until they got knocked out by a stray hammer or fist to the face and strung into some fancy necklace, that is.

The Deadly Nadder, bird-like in appearance and possessing enough vanity for ten Snotlouts, had spikes jutting out of its head and could produce new ones from its tail. These spines could be fired at unsuspecting victims, the force and sharpness enough to run a row of

three men through. They weren't really though much of, though, on account of their more agile and graceful characteristics in comparison to other dragons' more brutish, more prize-worthy looks and abilities.

The Gronkle, a more tough and brutish dragon compared to the last with a face that looked to be suffering from a bad case of acne. As silly as they looked with those tiny wings that buzzed like a hummingbird's or a bees, the Gronkle's ability to chew rocks and spit them out as scalding lava more than reminded him of its destructive capabilities.

The Terrible Terror, more an annoyance than an actual danger, due to it being one of the smallest dragons in existence. Even a fully grown Terror was about half the size of a sheep, and Hiccup had often though the Terrors might be more suited to be house pets than anything else. But his father and the village sought to wipe out every dragon that dared to set claw on their island, and the Terror was no exception.

The Hideous Zippleback, one of the more peculiar breeds on account of the fact that it had two heads instead of one. One head breathed a thick green gas that could be ignited into a cloud of flame once lit by the electric spark produced by the other head. Scary, but Hiccup did think it strange how two heads could work one body without any kind of complications.

And then, there was the most dangerous one of them all, the Monstrous Nightmare, the dragon that only the best of the best like his father could kill. The Nightmare was especially destructive due to not only being able to breathe but also light its own body on fire. A temperamental creature that could incinerate a whole forest in a single tantrum, it was hardly a wonder why this breed was the first one Vikings sought to take down.

Even when he had been trapped inside the house on those terrible nights when the raids were occurring and the village was being reduced to ashes by their flames, Hiccup was able to see each and every dragon from his window. He saw them as they flew by, taking notice of their shapes, their sizes, the sound of their screeches, the way they flew and how fast, any little attribute he could before they were captured, killed, or flew away with something. But out of this plethora of dragons that he had burned into his memory, none of them resembled the kind of dragon Toothless was at all. Just that one fact was enough to stir a sense of excitement in Hiccup, knowing that he had seen a dragon that no one else had.

'_Toothlessâ€¦ just what kinda dragon is he?' _Hiccup thought. '_Hmmm, maybe Gobber or Elder Gothi knowsâ€¦'_

Next to his father, Gobber and the elder Gothi, the wise woman who knew all due to her strange rituals claimed to be communion with the Gods, were the smartest people he knew. Gothi in particular, since she could tell how long someone would live based on the look of their tongue, at least that's what stories said about her. Still, Hiccup would have to be careful with his words and avoid telling them about Toothless outright. He would have to find some other way to coax the knowledge out of them, exactly how he would find out later as he finished his breakfast quickly, risking getting a stomachache. He put the plate back in the kitchen and finished with his morning household

chore of sweeping the floor, flinging the dust around with their old broom that had limited straws remaining on its end. He tossed the broom aside, grabbed a fur tunic, opened the door and bolted out without a second thought.

* * *

><p>Another day of sun, but there were much more clouds rolling in over the skies of Berk than there were yesterday. The increasingly cold temperatures were another sign that the winter weather was coming in soon; well, the bad winter weather. The villagers had goosebumps on their skins and hairs standing on end that signaled the oncoming of fierce blizzards that would leave their crops devastated and their roads buried under several feet of snow. Hiccup figured soon would be a good time to grab that bear fur vest that the seamstress had made to brace himself against the cold, but whether anyone believed it or not, he could handle himself fine right now. Vikings big or small could and really had to handle a little cold, it was necessary in order to survive on the parlous floating rocks many tribes called home. Even if he got sick most of the time, winter never really bothered him much climate wise. Still, he knew that this would have been the worst time to suffer another dragon raid, when their farm animals would be relied on so heavily to provide food.<p>

Hiccup walked through the streets slightly huddling to himself to keep some warmth in â€“ he could handle it, but not as well as others. He just held his hands lightly against his arms, just keeping up his pace to keep the blood flowing throughout his system. He could spot his destination from where he stood, the elder's house built atop a spire of rock around the front of the island. Gothi's hut was placed precariously at the top, converted from half of an old ship with holes carved in for the windows and the door. Moss grew along the hull and rim, while colorfully painted Viking shields were hung along the sides and near the entrance along wood fences nailed onto an overseeing platform. There were streams of short cloth fluttering in the breeze that looked to be banners of some kind, but upon closer inspection was really just the old woman's dirty laundry hanging to dry. Creaky, highly unstable steps unevenly placed ran along the side to the back of the house and along the wood poles holding the house upright. Really, given its age and shoddy construction, it was a wonder the place didn't fall apart within the first few weeks of being built. But then again, the house was probably like Gothi herself, old and fragile yet at the same time belying a tough as nails fortitude.

He was heading for the hut when he heard a mass commotion coming from the direction of the docks. Turning around for a moment and running up to the cliff above he could see that nearly the entire village had gathered on the plank bridges that ran along the cliffside to the small harbor where their ships were prepared. Men were hauling barrel-loads of weapons, every kind the forge had possessed the knowledge to craft, and loading them up unto the vessels, some carrying two or three barrels at a time. The sides had been decorated like Gothi's hut with painted Viking shields depicting the symbols of various clans around the island, their more pristine condition being the only difference. Others were pulling on the ropes and letting loose the large sails marked with the standard crest of a Viking face with an open jaw. The wind was already blowing strong and pushing the sails forward, rocking the boats against the water, while the steel

anchors below kept them secured by the dock.

Several men and women are already boarding, each carrying their own basket filled with much-needed provisions for what was long known to be a dangerous, uncertain voyage. They were filled with everything from yak jerky and spare legs to satisfy stray hunger pains to bandages for quickly treating injuries to bolas and spare arrows for their crossbows. The area around where the nest was suspected to be was largely uncharted territory, and several boats had long since vanished there, lost to the dragon attacks that came without a hint of warning.

Vikings were more than willing to perish in a battle for glory, but that didn't mean they wouldn't go in prepared â€“ Stoick certainly wouldn't have it. With the numerous women and children that had gathered upon the walkways to bid their loved ones farewell as they always did before another hunt, the chief wanted to ensure they would have someone come back for them.

"Get those barrels loaded! Ready to hoist anchor!" Shouted a booming voice from below.

And there was the man in question, standing there at the front of a ship, a particularly heavy basket slung along his back and a sword pocketed at his left side. His fur cape fluttered in the strong wind while he stared unflinchingly out to sea, probably telling himself what he always did, Hiccup figured. Today would be the day, today he would find the nest, take out the dragons, and ensure Berk's safety forevermore. He always said that, before each and every nest hunt, and every time, he would come back with a singed and broken boat, exhausted men, and an even fouler mood. Most were sure, including him, that this time would be no different.

Stoick had turned back and was now helping pull up a few more men onto the ship when he looked up towards the walkways and caught Hiccup's gaze looking back down on him. Seeing his father gaze at him was enough to make Hiccup visibly flinch, a movement even noticeable from the great chief's position below. Stoick only scowled and shook his head for whatever reason and looked away, turning his attention back to the prior task of helping his allies.

Hiccup had assumed he was still angry at him for his disobedience by going into the woods, for recklessly putting his life in danger for assumed reasons. It didn't matter, though â€“ if he had never gone, he would never had met Toothless, and would be completely alone right now. If Hiccup knew such an amazing friend had been waiting for him inside the forest that day, he would have run in as quickly as his little legs could take him. But as happy as he was knowing that Toothless would be there for him, he admittedly would have liked it if his dad weren't so angry with him, which these days seemed to be all the time now.

"Set sail for Helheim's Gate!" Stoick cried.

With a push from the warriors chosen to remain behind, the boats were shoved off, letting the wind continue the journey, The tides shifted and churned, but otherwise remained calm; looking at the waters gave Hiccup a bad feeling of what might happen out there. The other children seemed to sense this too, waving at their brave fathers from the very edge of the docks and pathways, their other hands gripping

firmly onto those of their mothers' for support. Hiccup could only imagine what that could be like, never truly knowing now that his own was gone forever.

Depressing thoughts aside, he reminded himself of his previous objective and set off to the elder's hut. He had someone waiting for him, after all.

* * *

><p>It took a fair amount of climbing, both on the steps and scaling the rock with his own hands and feet, but he made it to the hut. The tunics and animal skins fluttered like ribbons that gauged the strength of the wind that blew upon them. The wind had managed to blow off stray traces of the moss that seeped into his nostrils and triggered a sneeze from the boy.<p>

He stood currently under the shadow of the figurehead of her home, the one that stood upon most houses â€“ one of a dragon with a sword running through his skull. Looking up at it made Hiccup gulp with anxiety â€“ even before meeting Toothless those figures had left him uneasy â€“ but he turned away and instead focused on the old woman standing on the edge of the outlook.

The decrepit woman had braided white hair messily kept in braids with a tiny Viking helmet atop her head. She was bone thin, almost like him, but she had old age to back up her appearance, which also supported the large hunch she sported on her back. Her aged fingers still managed to grasp tightly onto the wooden staff she wielded, which drew pictures into a thin layer of dirt onto the ground. His sneeze from before had alerted her to his presence, and she slowly turned to face him, unfazed by the sudden sound. Gothi didn't seem too happy, but she didn't seem mad either â€“ she sported a look of indifference, but everyone was still mad at him, and Hiccup figured she would be no different.

"Uhâ€¦ H-Hi, miss Gothiâ€¦" Hiccup nervously waved.

Gothi said nothing in reply, but of course, she never said anything to anyone, always remained silent no matter the situation. Somewhere along the way in her long, long life, she had taken to a vow of silence, perhaps as an honor to a lost loved one. That was what his father always told him anyway, but really, even he wasn't too sure.

Either way, the only audible sounds that escaped her were sighs, grunts, gasps and groans; other than that, she communicated by drawing nearly unreadable symbols in the dirt. She had done so now, and Hiccup, being as young as he was, couldn't begin to understand what she was writing, or drawing as it were.

"She says you'v come fur answersâ€¦" Sounded a voice behind him. Hiccup yelped and turned around with a jump to see Gobber grinning toothily at him.

"Gobber, will you please stop doing that!" Hiccup whined.

"Aw, quit yur whining; this ol' dog's gotta have a few laughs, doen' he?" Gobber chuckled, hobbling over to stand at the elder's side. "Gods know yur father's not exac'ly a prime source o'

entertainment."

Hiccup still pouted in frustration, to which Gobber's jovial expression soon morphed into one of bored annoyance. "I tak it by tha' look yu don wan me here providing ma services. Fine, no skin off ma leg, sure you can find _someone_ around who doesn' wanna lop yur head off to help you ou an translate fur this ol bat!"

Hiccup grimaced and looked to the ground in depression while the woman whacked Gobber on the head with his stick. Obviously her payback at insulting her age, but with Gothi you never knew â€“ she was a woman of many mysteries. Gobber let out a tiny yelp of pain and grumbled while rubbing his nose in irritation. Gothi simply returned to drawing her symbols in the dirt while Gobber looked on, interpreting every line, every squiggle. He was one of the few people eccentric enough himself to be able to read her drawings and inform others of what she was trying to say. She concluded after a few moments and placed her stick to her sides.

"She says yuv come seeking knowledge regarding dragons." Gobber translated.

Hiccup looked up again and shifted his gaze back and forth between the old Vikings who were looking at him with skepticism clear in their eyes. The beads of sweat were rolling down his face already, despite the cold, and he was only too lucky that they had failed to notice. His next few words had to be carefully chosen to avoid saying anything too revealing, and certainly not anything along the lines of 'I found a dragon in the woods and made friends with it.' His lack of skill at lying considered Hiccup figured the best option was to stick to the truth, and just not reveal all the facts.

Bringing his hands behind his back, Hiccup smiled nervously and spoke. "Yeah! I.. I was just, well, curious about dragons. I mean, thinking of the othersâ€¦ in the arena, I was wondering ifâ€¦ if maybe, you might have seen any kinds ofâ€¦ different dragons."

"Ah, come ta get a head star' on dragon trainin', hav ya?" Gobber chuckled, to which Hiccup agreed, bobbing his head up and down so fast his facial features seemed to blur.

Gothi narrowed her eyes to peer closely at the secretive child, smacking her lips in deep thought while the boy nervously retreated under her gaze. His heart must have been beating a thousand times a minute, he was so nervous. She was inspecting him top to bottom, perhaps searching for any sign of dishonesty or waiting for the very moment he would break.

In Hiccup's defense, it was natural for children his age to be curious about dragons, given the standards of their culture and the dragons they had captured in the raids. Soon enough those dragons would be used to train a new generation â€“ his â€“ to become the next warriors to fight the battle and eliminate the dragons just as their predecessors had done. It would be a competition, true to Viking nature, and the winner who did the best would receive the great honor of killing his first dragon in front of the entire village. No self-respecting Viking warrior to be would ever pass up that prize, especially not the chief son, who at this moment had a lot to prove.

But at this point to the old woman it seemed he had other thoughts and other intentions on his mind, aside from slaying dragons. Disappointing really, because what she saw at the moment she looked at him seemed to be far more interesting, something mysterious in the boy's aura. As much as dragons were held in rancor by her and the rest, she had never been one to ignore the signs of destiny, no matter what they held.

"Uh, Gothi?" Gobber asked, a hint of concern hidden deep in his tone. "Hello? Midgard ta Gothi?"

She shook her head slowly and scribbled in the dirt again, and Gobber seemed to be having a little trouble understanding what the symbols meant. "Hmmâ€¦ erâ€¦ she says ya been sleepin with a daggur in yur mouth. Aww, just like I did when I was lit'l." Hiccup took a moment from his anxiousness and raised an eyebrow while Gothi whacked him in the face again and continued her drawing, trying to make it more clear for the smith. "Right, ahâ€¦ Gothi wants ta know if you'v been havin any strange dreams."

Confusion was etched along Hiccup's features as he wondered what she was getting at, before it came flooding back to him. Gently so, the memories of the strange dream he had experienced the night came in, the hazy glimpses of people and places that made no sense at all. Admittedly the dream had been nearly forgotten, as all dreams were, but this had been so out of the ordinary something in him told him that he shouldn't forget. It was almost as if the dream had been encased in some protective barrier deep within his subconscious protecting it from fading into oblivion.

The things that stood out most prominently were the rider and the dragon, in armor and scale colored black like a moonless sky. The dragon, he assumed was the same breed as Toothless, but as logical as it seemed, his heart was telling him it was indeed Toothless. Hiccup just guessed then that the dragon was an older Toothless, but what of the rider? Well, if the dragon was an older, bigger, stronger Toothless, then could it have been possible that the riderâ€¦ was an older him?

He shook his head; there was no possible way that could have been him at all. That guy was strong, cool, amazing, and the bravery it must have taken to actually ride a dragon let alone stand on it and swing swords around. He was just a scrawny joke that couldn't even swing a stick imagining it to be a sword without fear of hurting some defenseless person or creature. Not like he'd have the strength to injure it anyway.

Besides, the dream showed plenty of other stuff that was pretty much impossible: demon dragons, ice-spitting dragons, swords lighting on fire. No, dreams were cool and nice and all, but they were only dreams, tall tales the mind created to amuse the dreamers while they slumbered, and this was without a doubt one of the tallest tales imaginable.

"Umm, nope! No weird dreams, here." Hiccup stated nervously. "Just normal dreamsâ€¦ about foodâ€¦ and sailingâ€¦ and stabbing something over and over."

Gothi and Gobber looked at each other before looking again at him skeptically for a few moments before finally giving in. Gobber

hobbled over and gave him a rough rub on the head messing his hair. "Right, wellâ€¦ fur yur dragon question, I suggest ya take a peek a' this." He handed Hiccup a small, thread-bound book, with leather covers and old pages worn from many years of handling. Hiccup held the book in his hands, able to feel its antiquity simply through touch alone.

"What is it?" He asked with awe twinkling in his forest green eyes.

"This hereâ€¦ is tha Book o' Dragons." Gobber stated with a solemn tone to reflect the book's importance. "Written by ma great-great-great gran'dad Bork tha Bold over three-hundred yeers ago, within its pages lies every bit o' knowledge we've gained ovar every dragon tha's evur plagued the skies o' Berk."

Hiccup's eyes widened, contining to stare at the small object in his hand that contained centuries' worth of knowledge. To think that every bit of information about all of the dragons the people of Berk had ever seen since they had first settled upon the Island of Berk was written down here. Surely some record of Toothless' breed might have been recorded here; even Bork the Bold must have caught sight of some dragon as black as night. Bork had several run-ins with all kinds of dragons over the course of his life, all of which being rather bad, leading some to call him 'Bork the Very, Very, Very Unfortunate.' But really, if it wasn't for his fabled bad luck, his descendants wouldn't have this book today, and Hiccup would have nothing to go on in his search for answers.

"Yeah, I tried givin' it to yur cousin Snotlout, but he'd sooner squeeze out 'Is own eyeballs than read, which is a cryin' shame." Gobber ranted on while Hiccup continued to look at the book. He bended down low so only the boy could hear the next part. "It's 'is mouth tha's tha real pain."

Hiccup ignored the old smith's comment and immediately bolted away, giving a single "Yeah, great; thanks, Gobber!" and starting the dangerous climb back down to the plaza. He rushed down the steps at lightning speed, without giving much thought to the poor quality of the steps as he did on the way up. Gobber just looked annoyed as he watched the boy climb down again before smiling and shaking his head, turning back to face the old elder.

"Tha' boyâ€¦ can ne'er sit still for a second." Gobber said, gesturing with his hook to the boy's assumed position, unable to see him past the wood. "He'll be a heck o' a dragon slayer someday."

Gothi seemingly made no response, no smile, no nod or shake of the head, simply turned back around to gaze at the clouds in the sky, watching their shapes and the speeds of their movements. Such movements could give subtle hints to the whims of fate, or deliver messages from the gods themselves. Her eyes were old and weary, yet they had been trained to see such signs. Gobber hobbled back over to her side, wary of her unnatural behavior.

"Somethin' wrong?" He asked. "Yur not still wonderin' bout the dream thing, are ye? Since when is the goin's-on of a seven-year old's imagination somethin' o prime concern?"

Gothi only sighed. For one of the few times in her life, she didn't know.

* * *

><p>Hiccup had made it back into the cove in record time, not sure how but had managed to remember the path to it step by step. He was lucky that no one had spotted him go into the woods, but he doubted he was nearly as stealthy as would have been required. Odds are that once again, no one bothered to notice that he had gone in. With his father gone, his safety wasn't of any concern to the rest and they let him go on his way. That was fine with him â€“ he could spend hours in these woods with Toothless, anyway.<p>

And speaking of Toothless, as soon as Hiccup had entered the cove, the little dragon shot out from behind a giant rock and tackled him to the ground, drowning him in a barrage of slobbery dragon kisses. Each lick was as quick and as happy as the last, each clearly shouting 'You came back!' and 'I'm so happy to see you!' Hiccup just giggled uncontrollably while the dragon continued his onslaught of joyous licks, his arms flailing everywhere, and his lungs running out of air from both the laughing and Toothless' black paws on his chest.

"Okay, okay! Stop it! I'm happy to see you too, Toothless! Justâ€¦ no more licking!" Hiccup said in between his bursts of laughter. The dragon complied, sitting upright while Hiccup sat back up himself, catching his breath and letting it fuel his lungs back up with sweet air. Toothless, in the meantime, had taken to nuzzling Hiccup hard on his little chest.

Finally recovered, Hiccup smiled and took out the leather book he had stuffed in his pants underneath his shirt and held it out. "Hey, Toothless, look at this!" He cheered excitedly.

The dragon took a look at the strange object and sniffed it to explore what it could possibly be. It didn't smell of blood, which was good â€“ the smell of blood was always enough to drive dragons into fierce caution. Instead it smelled slightly like his boy, of leather and charcoal coming from within what looked to be yellow leaves. Toothless looked back to Hiccup and cocked his head in confusion, wondering just what was the mysterious thing he held in his hands.

"I was wondering what kind of dragon you are, and Gobber gave me this! It's called the Book of Dragons, and it tells everything on every kind of dragon there is!" Hiccup said.

Obviously that might have been a stretch, the intelligent little dragon thought, for this 'book' to have all knowledge of all dragons. Surely there were many dragons the humans here had yet to encounter, there was no way they had seen every dragon in existence. Toothless didn't really remember much of where he had come from, but he remembered dragon of all kinds in a big place, very far from where they were now. He had never seen the dragons from that place here in any moment of the days he had been stuck here, obviously the humans' knowledge was limited. Very limited, from what he had seen in the daily lives of the people in the village when he hid under bushes to watch. But his boy seemed plenty excited, so why spoil it for him?

"I was thinking maybe it'll tell us what kinda dragon you are!" He said, and Toothless purred in response. Hiccup opened the book to its first page, and looked to Toothless again. "Come on, let's read it together!"

Toothless cooed and laid on the ground right behind him, curling himself around Hiccup's little body. Hiccup chuckled and looked to the first page, noting how it was divided, impressed that Bork would pay so much attention to organization. The dragons had been divided into several different classes: Tidal Class, for underwater-dwelling dragons, Mystery Class, for dragons with unusual abilities and habits, and Fear Class, for more sneaky dragons. There was also Sharp Class, for especially prideful dragons with sharp body parts, Stoker Class for dragons with particular affinities and resistances to fire, and the Boulder Class, for heavily built dragons that could devour earth in their jaws. The one class that looked the most appealing to the young boy was the Strike Class, containing rare breeds of especially lethal and intelligent dragons that few Vikings had ever seen let alone survived against. He decided to look through each of the pages, hoping soon enough he would find a dragon resembling Toothless.

Starting at the beginning, he found a page with a flat looking dragon colored blue with drawings of ocean waves next to it. The dragon had an enormous mouth, bigger than even his father's or any Viking, and was letting loose what looked to be gusts of air from within. Hiccup squinted his eyes as he read, trying to make out the bigger, more difficult words as best he could.

"Thunderâ€¦drum. This reâ€¦cluâ€¦sive dragon inhabits sea caves and dark tide pools. When startled, the Thunderdrum produces a con-a concussâ€¦ a concussive sound that can kill a man at close range. Extremelyâ€¦ dangerous, kill on sight." He read, and frowned. The creature sounded utterly terrifying, and the picture of its vicious-looking eyes wasn't exactly helping relieve that fear. He hoped he wouldn't run into a dragon like that any time soon. Nonetheless, he continued reading, startling Toothless who was sniffing at the pages as he turned them.

The next page contained a large horned dragon similar to the Monstrous Nightmare, but with no legs, instead replaced with enormous wings slicing through trees. "Timberjack. This gigantic creature has razor sharp wings that can slice through full-grown trees. Extremely dangerousâ€¦ kill on sight."

At least the words were easier to read that time, Hiccup though as he turned the page. Before he even knew it, his imagination was kicking into gear and the illustrations were moving on their own in his mind's eye. It was actually more fascinating than scary to watch these majestic beasts move and display their individual talents as he watched them fly and cut and burn and roar. The next page he turned to had another dragon that came from the water, this one with a large belly and a large lower jaw like a pelican, spraying a stream of water, surprisingly, out onto a crude drawing of a Viking boat.

"Scauldron, spays scalding water at its victims." He read slowly. "Extremely dangerous, kill on sight."

He turned the page again with a somewhat annoyed frown. The next page had a red-violet dragon with long tentacles coming out from behind its head, its hypnotic eyes glaring at an unsuspecting Viking while shooting a green liquid at him. "Changewing, even newly hatched dragons can spray acid. Extremely dangerous, kill on sight."

His frown evolved into somewhat of a scowl as he continued to skim through the pages and looking at each dragon drawn and analyzed inside. He wasn't as annoyed at not finding Toothless' breed just yet as he was at the repetitive precautionary measures for each dragon of 'kill on sight' written for each one. Every dragon onward, the Gronkle, the Boneknapper, the Skrill, the Whispering Death, the Snaptrapper, the Monstrous Nightmare, the Deadly Nadder, the Hideous Zippleback, even the Terrible Terror.

Every last one of them was labeled the same thing, and Hiccup swore the more he read the same words again and again, the more he could see the fear placed into the original writer's hand as he inscribed it. They were all 'extremely dangerous,' but Hiccup had wondered if people after Bork had really taken the time to look into each of these dragons and investigate if it were really so. This book was written three-hundred years ago, so something had to have changed or someone would have questioned its legitimacy. If other dragons were like Toothless, Hiccup thought, then obviously something was wrong or Bork was misinformed or mistaken in some way.

His questions of the warnings were immediately stopped as he turned to a page that had next to nothing on it. No illustration of any sort to suggest what this dragon was, nothing except for a title at the top of the page and a sparsely detailed message written below. Hiccup carefully read the title, something in him able to tell that this dragon was different compared to the others.

"Night Fury. Speed unknown, size unknown. Theâ€¦ the unâ€¦holy â€“ unholy offspring of lightning and death." Hiccup's eyes widened, such a reputation easily convincing his young mind of how this dragon stood on a level far above that of the other dragons. Behind him, Toothless' ears perked up at the impressive name, daydreaming of how it could strike fear into Viking hearts but at the same time thinking of how silly it was. A dragon's parents being lightning and death, what stories these humans tell. "Never engage this dragon. Your only chance, hide and pray it does not find you."

Hiccup closed the book slowly in fear at the final message; the others' warnings of killing on sight, redundant as they were, still suggested that Vikings had a chance when engaging them. This dragon, the Night Fury, people were suggested to hide in its presence, something that no self-respecting Viking worth his helmet would never do. Such a message told of how pointless a battle with this dragon was, how effortlessly it could kill even the mightiest warriors that dared beyond any sense of logic to challenge it. Hiccup tried to imagine what such a creature would even look like without a clear picture provided by the book, but found even his creative mind coming up short. Exasperated, he slumped back onto Toothless' side.

"Ahh, Toothless. I can't believe it, none of those dragons looked like you at all." He said with a growl etched into his voice. "Some help this thing turned out to be."

Toothless, in the meantime, was nosing the book with his snout,

trying to nudge it open again. He whined at Hiccup to grab his attention, which succeeded as the boy watched his efforts with a confused stare. Toothless looked at him with pleading eyes and let a small whine out.

"What is it? Did you find something?" Hiccup asked, unsure of what he could have missed. Nonetheless, he opened the book again and Toothless turned the pages rapidly with his snout, flipping several pages over at once. Hiccup got the hint and started flipping through the pages himself, more gently so Toothless didn't accidentally rip them. Toothless let out a bark when Hiccup had stopped at the page of the Night Fury, turning Hiccup's attention to him once again.

"Is this the page you wanted to see? The Night Fury?" Hiccup asked. Toothless bobbed his head and rumbled in agreement.

Hiccup looked to the page and back to him. "What are you so interested in this dragon for? There's no picture or anything, and it sounds super scary." He said.

Toothless just looked at him, then to the book, and then to Hiccup again. He remembered a cry that sounded just like those words in his past, although he couldn't remember who they were referring to. He was sure, though, that the humans referred to a type of dragon just like him by that name. And the look on Hiccup's face, slowly switching from one of confusion to one of realization, suggested he was beginning to understand this.

"A-are you sayingâ€¦ this dragonâ€¦ is you? You're aâ€¦ a Night Fury?" He asked, and to his utter shock, Toothless nodded.

Hiccup couldn't believe it â€“ his friend, Toothless, was in fact the most dangerous, powerful, and mysterious dragon in existence, the unholy offspring of lightning and death, was in fact the little dragon sitting right next to him at this very moment. His friend was a dragon that no man could fight and live to tell of it, a dragon most likely lethal enough to kill a man with a single blast.

He wasn't scared: he had seen how nice Toothless was, how much he liked him, going against his seemingly evil nature. Just the opposite, really, it made him feel invincible, knowing that such a powerful creature cared for him so, was like a brother, a guardian to him from the way he was ready to defend him from a threat yesterday. Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III was friends with the legendary Night Fury, the greatest of all dragons.

It was such a revelation that all Hiccup could mutter was a single breath of a word.

"Wowâ€¦"

* * *

><p>Review, favorite, follow! Keep those compliments coming! Hopefully, with how long this chapter is, you'll still be reading by the time I get to posting the next one!

6. Chapter 6

Well, we've reached another milestone, 100 favorites. This is so amazing, I'm glad that so many of you like this story. You guys make it all worth it. I hope you enjoy this chapter, it marks a huge milestone in the relationship between Hiccup and Toothless. It was a bit tricky to write and I'm not sure if it came off the way I wanted it to. I'm worried about repeating any thoughts or dialogue said in previous chapters. But I am happy with the way some of it came out, especially the end.

Hope you guys enjoy it.

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* * *

><p>Several weeks had passed since Hiccup had first met Toothless, and the duality of the experiences and the emotions in that time were like night and day.<p>

There were the times in the village, moments of pure suffering that seemed to drudge endlessly on without any signs of stopping. Completely on his own, with no one to really talk to, relate to about problems he'd been having, or any sort of hurt feelings. Waking up every morning to find that he'd had a whole house to himself, with no mother or father to enjoy the day with. Even bringing up word could have been considered a sign of weakness in the eyes of others, and they were already placing too many expectations on the would-be chief.

The last thing he wanted to do was disappoint them any further by complaining about how lonely he was and add fuel to the fire. He'd simply carry on with his chores, making a few mistakes due to his somewhat natural clumsiness and getting a few odd glares here and there, and just try and get through those weary morning hours.

Of course, it was never that easy â€“ his horrible troll of a cousin and his little lackeys the twins made sure of that. Every day they would corner Hiccup into some random part of the village where no one could spot them, somewhere new each and every day, and would get to teasing the poor boy. Though, their idea of teasing was not only to insult but to pummel the boy until purple became a near-actual skin color for him. Yanking his hair, kicking him in the stomach once he collapsed on the ground, even pinning him to the wall by strangling his noodle-like neck, any sort of physical torment that crossed their demented little minds.

But Hiccup could never really be sure of what really hurt more between the punches they'd dealt or the mockery they'd spat out. Horrible things along the lines of 'coward,' 'weakling,' 'loser,' and cruel ballads they'd made up of 'Hiccup the Useless' and his many failures. And, the worse he'd felt once he'd stepped out into public and be faced with the mortifying looks of disgust from others, the better Snotlout felt.

Hiccup was rarely one to get mad, but he couldn't help but be sick at how his sadistic cousin smiled every time he was humiliated, reprimanded or ignored for his inability to even raise up a fist in his defense, his incapability to be normal. It caused the boy to develop a sneer of arrogance that was all his own, a smugness that Hiccup swore would remain frozen on his ugly, pig-like face one

day.

The only reprieve he really got while in the village was when he did his assigned duty of working with Gobber at the forge. The smith had him do most of the cleaning, of course, but it wasn't like Hiccup complained over chores that were barely any different from what he did at home. The poor child had to throw himself into his work just to forget about what Snotlout and the twins had put him through earlier in the day.

And Astrid and Fishlegs were no help â€“ in those rare moments that either of them were there, they would simply frown and turn away, one in annoyance, the other in timidity. Either way, neither of them could be relied on, and Hiccup had stopped trying to ask them for help long ago, knowing that both were more interested in themselves and how they would be seen for associating with a runt like him.

It wasn't all bad though: there were several days when Hiccup would be pulled in by Gobber to learn new things about smithing and working with metal. He had taught Hiccup what metals to choose when making weapons, how to properly heat and refine the metal into heated coals and how to shape the metal into what he wanted. Their most recent lesson was how to put in details for the sword once the shape was set. Gobber figured Hiccup would enjoy this particular lesson due to the boy's fondness for drawing; Hiccup was a rather talented artist for his age and his room back at his house was littered with pictures that he had drawn. Pictures of the scenery around Berk, the mountains, the forests, the buildings, and the ocean surrounding the island, and even the people as they went about their daily business.

The skill in which his drawings were done suggested that Hiccup had a keen eye for detail, which showed when Hiccup had successfully crafted his first weapon â€“ a dagger with Norse runes imprinted on the blade. Gobber was greatly satisfied at how quickly Hiccup had come to learn the trade, and although he still had a long way to go, he remarked at how well of a job he did his first time around. It was in those moments that Hiccup could truly feel proud of himself, proud but not happy.

His real happiness came whenever he could sneak away into the woods and visit his friend Toothless, the Night Fury. His feet would twitch in impatience for the moment no one was watching and head off into the forest and head for the cove where Toothless was waiting. It really wasn't as difficult as it seemed since no one seemed to even want to build up the effort to pay attention to him anymore. With his father gone, no one had any sort of reason to care about him, in fact some seemed happy that he was out of their hair for the whole day.

It didn't matter; deep in that forest was someone who wanted to see him and would count the seconds until he did, someone who preferred his company over others of his own kind, someone who showed something akin to love for him alone and didn't need a reason to do so. So what if this person wasn't necessarily human; anyone who'd look down on his friendship with Toothless simply for that should just keep to themselves.

Each visit to that little cove that became their normal meeting spot always starting out the same: Hiccup searching around for Toothless,

who was remarkably good at hiding, and the dragon pouncing out, showering him with happy, excited licks and nuzzles. They would play whatever games they could think of, from hide-and-seek to tag, to hopscotch across the rocks sticking out on the lake. They would play pretend games of sailing out on the seas, fighting off pirates, traversing across dangerous mountains; Toothless was really good at playing pretend, being so much smarter than other dragons and understanding every word Hiccup said and played along with them. There were even days when they go to actually exploring the island, going deeper into the woods and finding nests for squirrels, birds and foxes and seeing all the babies sleeping inside, or climbing trees and hopping across the branches, Toothless helping the boy keep his balance. They would find caves and search for secret passages that they found leading to all manner of hidden spots along the island, one of which the base of the mountain that served as a landmark for Berk. Every day was an adventure for the two, and each served to bring them closer together.

He'd also come to learn more about dragons in general through Toothless, their little moments providing all sorts of knowledge the Book of Dragons had no record on. To its defense though, he was probably the only one who had ever gotten this close to a dragon without ending up a smoldering corpse. He learned of how dragons loved to be scratched and relieved of the itchiness their scales constantly inflicted when Toothless would melt into his angelic hands when he'd scratch him. Hiccup also found out about the sensitive spot Toothless had underneath his jaw the hard way when the dragon suddenly collapsed and fell asleep for a few moments only to wake up somewhat confused minutes later.

Then of course was the field of grass that Toothless and other dragons like Terrible Terrors loved to roll around in, something about the soft feel and the spicy-sweet smell intoxicating them into a sense of pure ecstasy. Hiccup called it dragon nip because of the similar effect that cats experienced when exposed to catnip, as he'd read in one of the books found in Gothi's hut. It would take hours to pull Toothless away from that area, his dazed mind and dizzy kisses being somewhat of a problem, but he'd snapped out of it once they were far enough away.

As much as Toothless enjoyed his boy's company before, now he was practically a second shadow for Hiccup, following him everywhere. In fact several days had passed when Toothless had tried to follow Hiccup back into the village, into his house. Even against his better judgment, having seen the older Vikings, shouting angrily with their blades waving in the air, spilling the blood of dragons on the ground and onto their red, hairy faces. Perhaps he had seen how lonely Hiccup was, with no one to really talk to and being made to live in a house all by himself.

As tempting as it was to have Toothless with him in the house as company, it would surely lead to disaster. With an entire population of battle-hungry, blood-thirsty Vikings just waiting to sink their blades into some defenseless dragon's neck, bringing Toothless in was practically signing a death warrant for his friend. Not to mention surefire exile for himself, age being regardless in the face of treason. And knowing that he was helping to create those blades and weapons filled him with guilt, imagining how much blood would indirectly be placed on his hands.

Every day was the same, like a scheduled process â€“ wake up, go to work in the village and be bullied and miserable, go into the forest with Toothless and play, go back, be miserable again, go to bed. Be alone, be with Gobber, be with Toothless. It was a full spectrum of settings that went back and forth again and again like the ocean tides.

But then came the day that things really had started to change: the one day that Hiccup would never forget for as long as he lived.

It started out just like any other day, with Hiccup having just finished his duties over at the forge and having gone to the Great Hall to get lunch for himself. Not like he could really call it lunch, or even food at that, just a slop mix of chicken, vegetables, fish, and a mug of water haphazardly placed on the plate, tossed and jumbled.

No one on Berk could really say that they had expert culinary skills, even the wives and the bread-making Vikings that worked and served food on the hour over at the hall â€“ any food that people ate on the island couldn't exactly be rated very highly in terms of taste or appearance. But really, appearance was the best part about it, compared to how tough and flavorless the food really was â€“ to Hiccup it was practically like eating wood. His stomach grumbled and protested over what had been just placed into it as he walked out of the Great Hall and got ready to head into the forest for his normal playdate with Toothless.

While walking out, he took one last look into the Hall and saw all the other children, sitting together, talking and laughing while having their lunch. More than likely whatever they were laughing about was something said to his expense, but still, they all looked rather happy. Well, some of them did; Snotlout and the twins were guffawing and cackling so loud bits of the food they had jammed into their mouths was spraying out all over the table. Snotlout was flexing his already developing muscles in an attempt to show off, while Ruffnut and Tuffnut were quickly getting into a bit of roughhousing.

Fishlegs was chuckling, albeit nervously, but it had grown stronger once Tuffnut had slapped him on the back. As always, it looked as though he was being forced to enjoy himself with them, but he had made the choice long ago to hang out with them to avoid the torment he himself was receiving, so whatever pity Hiccup might have felt was naturally diminished somewhat.

And then there was Astrid, smiling to herself, probably ignoring comments from the others and thinking about what was in store for her. Ever since she had renounced their friendship, her parents had been putting her through heavy duty training in preparation for dragon training once she had come of age. Already she had shown exemplary results, showing acrobatic and axe-wielding prowess well beyond her age, about as much as the progress he himself had been showing at the forge. The only difference between them being that her efforts were being proudly acknowledged by a whole village, while any respect he was shown was begrudged for just barely making a dagger the right way. They'd cheer out her name, the great Hofferson lass, a true Viking prodigy, and she was slowly taking it all to heart.

Together, the five of them looked so natural â€“ the bully, his cohorts, the timid tagalong, and the pretty girl/former friend. He had to think since the moment he sat down at an adjacent table to eat alone how he would fit in over there, but straining himself to visualize his tiny frame sitting amongst them yielded no result. A mental block of some kind would hide even a glimpse of him from view while a voice inside would only tell him that his presence would be an anomaly amongst them, a piece of the puzzle or a peg in the construction that just wouldn't fit with the others.

He didn't really need anyone or anything to tell him that, though â€“ he knew just by looking at them and automatically recalling those hard moments that he wouldn't be accepted. So he simply turned away and headed for the forest, the others never even noticing he was there.

* * *

><p>The forest path was illuminated by the afternoon path, filtering in through the trees and lighting Hiccup's way over to the cove. He could swear the path to Toothless was somehow illuminated, the ground glowing and sparkling like if it was crafted of gold. The odd flowers that grew here and there along the sides of the path glowed as well with candle flames that reflected the colors of their petals. Hiccup smiled as well, never ceasing to be excited for a day of playing with his beloved dragon. With each step he took, Hiccup swore he could hear Toothless' excited barks and chirps growing closer and closer.<p>

His pace began to quicken, normal speed to powerwalking, then into jogging, and then into a full-blown run. He panted with excitement, smiling as bright as he possibly could, just keeping his eyes focused on the single destination lying ahead. His eyes twinkled, sparkling with the need to see Toothless more and more with each passing step. To escape the mundane sadness of his life in Berk at least for a few moments, letting all that negativity fade away in play with the close friend he had come to know in such a short time.

He was so fixated on his destination that he had completely failed to notice the sudden obstacle that presented itself. A small leg stuck out from behind a tree and tripped him up as he ran, his left foot hooking on the leg causing him to collapse. He felt his chin and elbows get skinned the second he collapsed on the hard dirt and rocks beneath him.

Hiccup inwardly groaned at the lack of grass there could have been to cushion his fall as he got on his knees. He continued to look down while starting to massage the damaged areas of his little body, feeling the little drops of blood that started to seep through.

"Aww, better be careful where you're going, Useless," sounded a smug-sounding voice from behind him. Hiccup cringed at the familiarity of both the voice and the tone, and slowly turned around.

There, standing in the shadows yet with his dark smirk still glowing menacingly, was Snotlout, crossing his large arms and looking down on his victim. Standing to each of his sides were the twins Ruffnut and Tuffnut, both with disturbing, toothy smiles on each of their faces

that could be summarized as nothing short of demented. All three of them were covered in blotches and stains that smelled of the food they served at the Great Hall. Obviously some big food fight broke out there and all three of them had been on the receiving end of some stray platter flung out of the blue. Hiccup could catch the scents of the food mixed together with their already foul body odors and had to heavily resist the urge to hold his nose. No reason to try and aggravate them even more.

Stink aside, Hiccup could not help but be unpleasantly surprised at the sight of his bullies standing a few feet away. He could have sworn they were so focused on eating they would not have noticed him leave. They must have followed him all the way here, run ahead, and laid in wait so they could ambush him. A bit of a change from the normal schedule to be bullied again after they had already gotten through with him earlier today, and Hiccup did not like the sudden deviation.

"Snotloutâ€¦ w-what are you doing here?" He gulped nervously.

Snotlout's smirk just grew wider and he huffed to himself. "You sound like you're not happy to see us. We just came to have some fun with you, our favorite little _runt_â€¦"

"I thought we came out here 'cause your mom was gonna give us all baths." Tuffnut suddenly chimed in. Snotlout's smirk quickly vanished in place of an exasperated frown.

"Well some of us do need it." Ruffnut added in a smug manner of her own.

"Yeahâ€¦ hey! Why're you looking at me!?" Tuffnut noticed that Ruffnut was indeed glancing at him when she spoke.

"Just noting where the sweet, sweet smell of boar guts and chicken is coming fromâ€¦"

"Like you're any better! That fish oil doesn't exactly smell like roses, you know!" Tuffnut argued, noting the fish oil Ruffnut used to wash her hair every day.

"'Scuse me if this look doesn't just happen!" Ruffnut shouted.

"Could've fooled me." Tuffnut taunted, reaching out and shoving his sister aside. "You get out of bed every morning looking like that!"

"That's cause I wash my hair before bed!" Ruffnut exclaimed, shoving Tuffnut aside just as he did to her. "Can I help it if I enjoy the feel of greasy hair on my pillow?"

"Just go get a yak to drool on you, same result. And it fits 'cause you look like a yak to boot!"

And off they went, colliding into each other and rolling over and over on the ground. They punched each other, bit each other, pulled each other's hair and called each other names. These arguments and the high brutality that often came up were pretty common among the

twins, so common that no one ever really bothered to stop them. Not even Snotlout, who just ignored their ongoing argument and walked over to Hiccup, towering over the scared boy.

The thuggish child just placed his arms behind his back and returned to the arrogant smile he had on earlier, while Hiccup had sat up and started backing away while Snotlout took small baby steps closer. He had taken notice of the scared look in Hiccup's eyes, the feeling of being like a mouse cornered by a dragon, and was eager to drag the torment on for as long as he could.

"So this is where you've been running off toâ€¦" He shook his head in mock disappointment and clicking his tongue. "Tsk, tsk, tsk, Hiccup, Hiccup, Hiccupâ€¦ you know well and good you aren't allowed to be out here in the woods."

Hiccup continued to back away, his eyes caught on Snotlout and gulping down while fear continued to build up in his stomach and throat every second. The small pebbles that pressed into his palm and caused mild pain or the itchiness of the grass rubbing on any bits of skin his clothes did not cover were ignored as he moved. Every time Snotlout had him surrounded, trapped with no means of escape, every one of his senses seized up and he could not do or say anything while his despicable cousin just went merrily along hurting him. This time was no different.

"Who knows what the others might sayâ€¦ and your dad, what will he think when he finds out you've been playing here againâ€¦" He mocked in a clearly faked caring tone. He never said it outright, but as dumb as he was, he was good at making questions or statements like those sound like threats. And Hiccup, smart as he was, caught on almost instantly.

The boy let out a sharp gasp. "Pleaseâ€¦ please don't tell him. You can't tell anybody I was out here."

Suddenly Snotlout laughed out loud, cackling with such force and such volume he had to hold onto his chest and knee for support to keep himself from falling over. "Oh come on!" He shouted in between laughs. "You really think anyone'll care if I tell them? Do you have any idea how relieved people are that they don't have to deal with you for all the time you're gone?"

Hiccup said nothing, only continued to back up in the face of Snotlout, taking his words to heart as he found himself doing with most insults these days. He had seen it on the faces of the men that came with his father, the people in the village. They never said or showed it fully, but Hiccup could see every time he came back out of the forest after playing with Toothless that something about them seemed different. Lines of stress and fatigue drawn around their faces were considerably less deep than they usually were. And every time he had entered the sights of some random person, those lines came back deeper than ever.

He had something to do with those lines, with their fatigue, just adding onto it somehow, without even doing anything. Their imaginations would conjure up all the ways he could get into trouble, the magnitude of the problems he might cause with every decision made or action performed, and how much extra time would have to be invested into cleaning it up.

"You're such a pest, I'm still wondering why your dad hasn't just sent you to live out here and be done with it. I mean, come on, he's already plenty sick of you." Snotlout continued to taunt.

At that point, Hiccup's fingers clenched into the grass, his fear giving way to a small flicker of anger that managed to seep through. Snotlout tried to say the same thing the other day, and it angered him then just as it did now. Though he had overheard his father spout pretty convincing evidence to support his cousin's claim the other day, his fearful rage had wiped the memory from his mind. He gritted his teeth and tried to look as fierce as he could. "Y-You're wrong! My dad loves me! He does!"

"Yeah, then how come he's always going off on raids and leaving you alone?" Snotlout asked.

At that Hiccup didn't answer, well aware of the increased frequency of his father's hunts to find the dragon's nest as of late. He could have said it was because of his father's fierce hatred of dragons that ran deeper than most others because of the way he lost his wife to them. He could have said it was his duty as chief to rid Berk of the dragons for good, but every answer he came up with seemed to raise more questions. How would killing dragons help him get over the pain? He had other duties as chief such as helping other families rebuild and keeping track of the food, why not take care of those? Every path in his mind that a supposed reason seemed to create only ran back the other direction and looped around. It left his mind in a tangled mess that kept him from answering or speaking once again, letting his three tormentors speak for him once again.

"He doesn't want to see youâ€¦" Tuffnut said lying on the ground.

"He doesn't want to look at youâ€¦" Ruffnut added.

"He doesn't even want to think about you! He's willing to sail off and risk his life fighting dragons, just so he can get away from you!" He stuck his face a few inches away from Hiccup's, letting his stinky breath clog up the smaller boy's nostrils. "If only the rest of us could be so luckyâ€¦"

By now, Hiccup had backed up into a tree, his back pressed hard yet he still continued to move back and drive himself in hoping he could just vanish into it. The situation seemed oddly familiar as Snotlout just moved in closer while keeping his hands behind his back, faking that polite demeanor he wore. "But hey, I'm a pretty understanding guy, and I can see that this upsets you. So as your loving cousin, I'll keep your secret, I won't tell anyone about how you've been ignoring your dad and coming here every day."

Hiccup gulped again, not believing a word he said. His words seemed sweet, but the mocking tone easily revealed how hollow the promise was. Yet still, he found himself asking. "Really?"

"On one conditionâ€¦" Snotlout said.

Hiccup just looked up again. "W-What's that?"

"You gotta do all our chores, mine and the twins. You'll give me all

your food, and your birthday and Snoggletog presents, and give me back rubs whenever I want for the next year." Snotlout said, and he quickly grabbed Hiccup by the chin. "Oh, and you'll come behind the Great Hall three times a day for a good beating. You wouldn't believe how relaxed I get after I've pounded the crud out of you. Say no to anything and, well, I wouldn't wanna be in your shoes once Uncle Stoick finds out, and he _always_ finds stuff out. Do we have a deal, _Useless?_"

Hiccup couldn't agree to this deal, it was a lose-lose situation no matter how he looked at it. He was fine with giving up his presents, he hardly ever got anything anyway. And he wasn't much of a big eater, either, which contributed to his smaller-than-average size. But going behind the hall three times a day would intrude on his time with Toothless, and going there just to get used as a punching bag by Snotlout didn't sound like a particularly enjoyable pastime. But it was this or let Snotlout tell his father once he got back and risk severe punishment at the hands of his father. He was trapped and there was nothing he could do about it.

"I'm waitingâ€¦" Snotlout teased.

The small boy just let the beads of sweat roll down his face, his nerves out of control just waiting for any brutality that Snotlout might employ to enforce his one-sided bargain. Behind his cousin, Hiccup could see the twins snickering, his terrified look a source of amusement for them. If he wasn't so scared, Hiccup would have been sick to their stomach of their cruelty.

He was about to answer; what he was going to answer was a mystery, though, when a building shriek filled the air. It was high-pitched, and raising in pitch each and every second. At that moment, a cobalt charge of fire hit the ground right in between Snotlout and the twins, exploding at the moment of impact. The children all screamed as a shockwave emerged from the spot the fireball landed, leaving behind a burnt crater in the ground, lingering flames still burning inside.

"W-W-Whatâ€¦ was thatâ€¦?" Ruffnut asked in a trembling voice.

"I-I don't know. But it was scary and awesome at the same timeâ€¦" Tuffnut tried to sound like his usual self, but he was erring more on the side of scared than impressed at that moment.

Snotlout's back had been facing Hiccup, still staring wide-eyed in horror at the sight of where the fireball had struck. He was hyperventilating, his tiny heart ready to burst right out of his chest, feeling like backing up into the tree as he had forced Hiccup to do for cover. He already had an inkling of what had happened, there was only one kind of creature that could do what they had just seen. He didn't know what kind, not having the experience his father and the other men did, but he wasn't willing to take any chances.

"You-You think it might've beenâ€¦"

Another fireball was launched, hitting the exact same spot the first one did, the shockwave expanding and dissipating to reveal the crater had grown even larger. Small pieces of debris flew out and hit them in the face, some lit on fire, leaving both bruises and small burns

on their faces. The three bullies jumped and yelped in fear before launching into full-blown screams of panic.

"A DRAGON!"

As tough as the three of them thought they were, they were in no way, shape, or form ready to handle any kind of dragon. And they wouldn't be until they underwent Dragon Training a few years ahead. For now, all they could do was scream and yell in fear and run away, their legs pedaling them further and further away with all the speed they could muster. Fireballs continued to launch right behind them, Hiccup noticed, still sitting there against the tree watching them run. Each fireball landed very close to their legs, dangerously close to blasting their legs right off.

"We-we gotta get outta here!" Snotlout shouted.

"What about Hiccup?" Ruffnut cried.

"Forget about him, no one wants him around, anyway!" Snotlout cried off into the distance. It was the last thing Hiccup could hear him say before they were completely gone from view.

Hiccup just continued to watch until the very last moment when Snotlout and the twins were too far away to be seen. Hopefully, whatever just happened would be enough to make him forget about his coming into the forest and his deal. At that point, he tried to get up, only to be snatched up by something right as he got to his feet. One second he was on the ground, the next he found himself zooming through the air.

Hiccup screamed in panic himself, grabbing onto whatever had grabbed him as he was carried several feet off the ground. He watch the trees pass by at such a quick speed, seeing groups of ten pass by every few seconds. The sticks, bushes, and rocks that he flew over turned into blurs of green, gray, and brown that blended into each other, and also seemed so small that he could barely see them.

He had to admit, seeing it all from so high up, about as high as when he climbed the trees surrounding the village, wasâ€¦ enjoyable in a way. Before he even knew it, the panic began to die down, and the screaming soon stopped; Hiccup just watched everything go past him, taking in every moment of his new vantage point.

It was then that the path gave way and Hiccup could see the cove come into view. It was amazing, seeing it all from so high up, the cove having no trees strong enough to support him so he could see it from high up. He could see everything, the cliffs, the pond, the rocks, and the sun as it shone down. All those factors put together, made it look so peaceful, so beautiful. Hiccup didn't imagine how beautiful this place was, never taking the full amount of its serenity in, at least not until he saw it in this way.

The cove came closer and closer, and Hiccup realized that whatever had taken him was setting him down. With his senses recovered, Hiccup could now hear strong wing beats coming from right above him, and when he grabbed on, he could swear he felt something scaly. The memory of the day this had happened before finally came back to him: he had to admit, the quick sequence of events hadn't given him much time to remember. He actually felt silly for not recalling such an

experience sooner. At the same time, though, he realized that he hadn't really taken the time to enjoy the view then; surely he could have put aside the shock then to take in the marvelous sight being presented to him. He finally looked up, and what he saw made him smile with excitement.

It was Toothless; he was the one who took Hiccup, just like the last time. The black dragon looked down at him and gave a cheerful gummy smile, calming whatever remained of Hiccup's panic.

They went lower and lower until finally Hiccup's feet managed to touch the ground. Toothless then released Hiccup's shoulders from his grip and landed right next to him, walking up to Hiccup and snuggling with him on the cheek. Hiccup giggled and backed away to grab the sides of Toothless's head.

"Toothless! You were the one who chased off Snotlout?" He asked. He felt he should have scolded Toothless for doing so, but he was too relieved to care.

Toothless just answered with a small growl. He had indeed seen how the other boy was making Hiccup scared, the small dragon smelling the fear coming off of his boy in droves. He wouldn't let anyone scare Hiccup or make him sad like that â€“ it made him furious just thinking about it. He did the first thing he could think of and fired at Snotlout and the twins to scare them off, and it worked; the cowards ran off with their tails between their legs. Relieved that his boy was now safe, Toothless gave him a gentle nudge to the chest and a happy purr.

"And you were the one who picked me up. And weâ€¦" And it was then the reality of what had just occurred finally hit Hiccup in full. Toothless picking him up, the high viewpoint, the speed at which they travelled. He suddenly found himself staring at Toothless's wings with his mouth hung open.

They were _flying_.

Toothless rumbled and crooned to grab Hiccup's attention, the boy shaking his head to break out of his stupor. He caught sight of how Hiccup was staring at his wings, turning his view from them to the boy, to them, and then to him again, and his eyes shone with excitement. He hopped in place and wagged his tail with such fervor, letting his tongue droop out; everything about the dragon in that moment seemed to scream excitement. He'd been waiting, hoping he could do this with Hiccup for some time, and was glad to see that his boy seemed to enjoy it so.

He bounced up to Hiccup and barked with more energy than even other dragons seemed to possess, then moved back to his previous spot. He bowed down and pulled his wings back, looking at him expectantly.

Hiccup just watched as the dragon went from bouncing around like an out-of control ball to bowing down before him, just looking at him. It seemed as if Toothless was waiting for him to do something, but what?

A moment's pause of staring at the dragon, who then gestured to his back with a chirp, and it became clear. Clear from stories he'd heard

of distant lands where men rode horses and crossed great distances, miles and miles between towns and kingdoms, as a result.

"You-You want me toâ€¦" He pointed to himself and then to him, and Toothless nodded repeatedly.

As exciting as it seemed, Hiccup had to back away at the unheard of chance that presented itself to him. Apparently, Toothless wanted him to climb onto his back and ride him! He wanted to take them both flying, properly flying; Hiccup could look down and see the world from the eye of a bird, like the ones he heard tweeting and flapping around him.

But humans' lack of wings were a clear sign that they were not meant to fly, the sky was meant to be an entire world away, serve as some wide stretch of blue they could only look at. It was meant to be like his clothes that were on that top shelf, something completely unreachable unless one had the means to do so. And to ride on a dragon, it was simply unthinkable; dragons were not docile pets to be ridden around like the horses from the tales.

"Uhâ€¦uhâ€¦uh..." was all he could bring himself to mutter.

But Toothless obviously was not taking no for an answer, quickly growing dissatisfied at Hiccup's hesitance. Like a flash, he zoomed behind Hiccup and stuck his head in between his legs, lifting his head up and letting Hiccup roll down to the spot just before his shoulder blades. Toothless crouched down and took off into the sky, unleashing a blast of wind that blew apart the twigs and dust from their takeoff point.

Hiccup grabbed onto Toothless's neck and clenched his eyes as tightly as he could, pressing himself against Toothless as much as he could as he did with the tree. He didn't know it, but his close proximity to Toothless allowed the dragon to take off even faster, reducing the drag that might have been caused by him sitting upright or even crouched. Hiccup could feel the wind firing at him with great intensity, blowing his hair away and nearly ripping him off Toothless as they went higher and higher. It was comparable to how strong the winds were during the many blizzards that hit Berk in their later winter years, gusts that could break houses apart in minutes.

Yet it was also so fresh, so invigorating, filling his chest and infusing him with feelings of confidence unlike anything he had ever felt before. Even the coldness of the air didn't seem to bother him anymore, all he could feel was the wind's might adding onto a power inside him.

Toothless then stopped and evened out, the wind returning to a gentle breeze. Hiccup lifted himself off the dragon's neck and opened his eyes. And he was astounded at what he saw.

All around him were pure white clouds, so fluffy they seemed like cotton or like pillows, shining to reflect the brightness of the sun. Hiccup looked in every direction and saw more and more clouds, Toothless taking him through an entire maze of them, with towers that reach up and spiraled around, swinging and dodging past scores of stray wisps of them. He spun around a large gathering of clouds, Hiccup reaching out and running his hand through them, feeling the water on his skin and taking it out once the freezing droplets got to

him.

Toothless then flew up again and right into a particularly large cloud, the two of them surrounded by white. It astounded Hiccup to see that clouds were empty and wet inside, not being as fluffy as he imagined they would have been when he was younger. Pockets of sunshine seeped through, making Hiccup imagine it to be like a tunnel of rock inside of a cave, with holes leading to the outside like windows. No, it was beyond anything he could have imagined.

They exited the cloud and Hiccup's eyes widened at the site of the entire forest sprawled out beneath them, far above the tops of the trees that he once believed reached up to touch the very clouds he had just flown through. Just one massive score of green composed on many fluctuating majestic heights of pine trees that had grown upon the lands for years that went out for miles on end, save for the edges of the island and the cliffs overlooking the sea. Shifting down slightly, Toothless's wings blew away pine needles that tickled his skin, while the tips of the trees did the same for the Night Fury's belly. Their actions alerted several birds who flew alongside them for a few seconds until turning away while the duo ascended again.

Toothless navigated them towards the mountain, and Hiccup could see the snowy ridges and numerous paths and crevices that made up its shape. All the lines and cracks he saw carved into the shape put his own drawings of the massive formations that he only saw at a distance to shame. They swung around its entire radius, passing through the clouds that surrounded it due to its high altitude, observing the light and the shadow play off of the rock's jaggedness and soon ascended further.

The continuously decreasing temperatures became evident as Hiccup saw his own breath fly past him in a puff of white vanishing instantly. It was the only sign, really, as he felt adrenaline surging throughout him, his blood warming his body while rushing through with all the speed Toothless had been using. His lungs tightened and his breaths came out shorter the higher they rose, the peak of the great mountain within sight as they broke through the thin clouds obscuring it from the view of those who remained on the land. He wondered as they rose up in altitude, just how high some of the men were able to reach, for those that had dared to climb the mountain on their own. How wonderfully ironic it was, that he, a child, had surpassed them all.

They entered into a dark tunnel that opened in one side of the mountain, passing through and dodging all the stalactites and stalagmites that extended from the ceiling and floor. Hiccup saw how the thin ice in the cave that covered the rock sparkled and glimmered like crystals in conjunction with the sun's rays reaching in from the opening. He could hear how the dropping water from the melting ice above fell into the puddles below sounded off like a symphony, the soft sounds echoing everywhere, resounding through the rocky space.

In tandem with the light, it was almost as if Hiccup could see the waves of light rippling through the cavern walls like on the surface of the pond in the cove, bright as could be as they extended before disappearing without a trace. They charged through to the other side, passing over the very tip of the mountain, brushing the snow off of

the top and causing a small avalanche that reached a little ways down the slope. By now, the air inside him was nearly gone and he was left breathless and gasping for more to replenish him, and he felt his blood rushing to his face tinting his cheeks in a bright shade of pinkish red, but Hiccup didn't care one bit. His heart had already stopped from everything he had just experienced so far.

Hiccup took it all in, the gentle breeze that blew across his face, the colors of the sky and the sights, oh the sights. To look at the world from this high up, a way that no one ever had or could ever do, and experience it all anew. It felt as though he was in another world entirely, a world unbound by rules or disappointment, where all that nature had restricted him with no longer applied. Here he feltâ€¦ reborn, like a new person, he feltâ€¦ free.

He smiled as Toothless took him over to the village, Hiccup taking comfort in the fact that no one would be able to see them, being so high up. He could see all the buildings, all the people â€“ on the ground they could boast about their size all they wanted, but from here they looked like ants. Hiccup could see all the formations of the island, how the houses and buildings were all pocketed into them and looked like dots of wood on the surface, adapted to the island geography with its higher and lower levels. He could see the pathways to the docks winding and turning about, the individual planks blending in to make them look like solid pathways. He could even see his own house sticking out at the top of the hill, taking into account how much larger it was compared to all the other houses and how it stood proudly overlooking the others.

He looked ahead then and saw the ocean, stretching out far beyond his view, how it shone with the fading rays of light, how it shifted and turned with the wind. The salty air catching his nostrils, even from their position; Hiccup wondered if this was the smell sailors smelt. The air of journeys that they breathed in with every minute spent on the water, of the open sea filled with promise. A realm of infinity, the edge where the water poured down into the abyss of nothingness all of a sudden a silly fib conceived by a morbid or limited imagination.

It was all so much to take in, all so beyond belief, that he just collapsed onto Toothless. His thoughts flooded with what lied out there, just waiting to be seen. What other sights he could be greeted with, just what the world had in store for the adventurous spirit within him. No longer could he be restricted to Berk, this cold rock sitting in the middle of the sea being all he would ever know. In lands unknown to him or anyone here, he could see his pretend adventures becoming real with startling clarity, all happening day after day â€“ from the back of his dragon, anything seemed possible now.

"Toothlessâ€¦ this is... just amazing. I love it; I never want to come down again." He gave his dragon a pat on the head, and the Night Fury purred in delight. "Thanksâ€¦ bud."

Toothless cooed and continued to fly off, feeling a renewed energy from within all from the happiness his boy now seemed to feel. He felt that same energy Hiccup felt from being so high up â€“ together, they could do anything, go anywhere, conquer any challenge. That feeling continued to flow as they flew off into the sun, staying up there in the sky for several more hours, neither able to remember

just when they finally came down.

All either of them could remember from that day was touching the sky and feeling free.

* * *

><p>I hope the flight sequence came off as realistic as it could be â€“ I just want to take in everything that happens, really pull the reader into it. I want my writing to convey that idea of realism into it, make it seem like a movie somewhat. I got some of the inspiration from 'Soarin', the 3D flying ride at Disneyworld. If you're there, I really recommend you check it out.

As always, review, favorite, follow!

7. Chapter 7

Okay, new chapter up and ready to go. Funny that I've got more demand for my other story, though, when this has plenty more followers. Oh, well, this is obviously the more popular of the two, so I'm more than willing to roll with that.

For those that have been saying I've been making the Berkians a little too harsh on Hiccup, looking back, yes I am inclined to agree with you. But hey, these are brutal people that are a bit too intolerant when it comes to difference like Hiccup's. I like to think of it as I'm not sugarcoating it like the film did. And for those who are feeling a bit bored, don't worry, things are finally going to start picking up in the next couple of chapters. Just hang tight â€“ I like to give proper time to develop things out, it's pretty much why my chapters are so long.

**Anyway, again, new chapter. Brace yourself, cause it's gonna get a little bit Kingdom Hearts-y. **

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* * *

><p>It was yet another uneventful day on Berk, the same frigid, horrid weather as always. Despite this, Hiccup was in much lighter spirits than ever before, with a spring in his step so large it seemed as though he may well be carried off the ground.<p>

It had been three days since his flight with Toothless around the whole island, and his every waking thought was consumed by the view he had been given from the back of his dragon. He'd spend hours just daydreaming while lying around on the grass of soaring through the sky, diving through clouds and zipping across the ocean's surface.

Gobber had noticed his behavior, repeatedly having to tell him to focus and get back to work once he'd caught him slacking off. The boy would just look up through the roof of the forge as he would before coming in, his sight almost penetrating through the wood roof to the sky. He was so distracted he would hardly notice when the metal of the daggers he worked upon were made so soft by the heat they melted off the hilt. Or when he swept aimlessly and filled the air of the

forge with dust, and they would have to fan it out and send the villagers into coughing frenzies. Hiccup's lack of concentration had caused so many problems Gobber was forced to make Hiccup take a few days off of work until he got his act together.

Though the timing couldn't have been worse, as the day after the men had spotted the ships on the ocean. Stoick and the men that had gone off in search of the nest were returning now, and based on the significant subtraction of boats from the fleet's original number, it had not gone well. It took a great deal of restraint for the Berkians not to groan collectively when the ships finally docked upon the shores crammed at every inch with Viking warriors. Every piece of wood that made up the hull of the ships was burned black while a great majority were broken and splintered. The shields on the rim of the boat, at least those that had not fallen off, had huge chunks blown off and were just as burned as the boats. The sails had been torn to ribbons, the shredded lines indicative of how dragon claws had ripped through like knives tore through paper.

And that was the couple of ships that still had masts; some had been ripped right off of the deck, the unlucky few tied with rope to be pulled by the ships that could still catch the wind. They stopped at the walkways, the tired, weary, injured men just itching to get off and go back to bed to forget the carnage they had experienced in the mists.

The bridges were laid out allowing the men to climb back up with help from those who had gathered, Gobber included. One of the first off the boat was Stoick, and surprise, surprise, he had a scowl locked on his face deep enough that even an ogre's face seemed much more pleasant. Gobber was all too used to that look, seeing it every month of every year since his longtime friend had ascended to chiefdom.

"So, how'd it go?" He asked in a sarcastically cheerful tone in hopes of lightening the other man's spirits after hefting him up onto the docks.

Honestly, he wasn't sure why he bothered, the heated, exasperated glare sent from the fiery-maned leader of Berk spoke of it all. It told of the entire story, how dragons suddenly emerged from the mists and rained their fire down upon the ship, burning both wood and skin. Men would scream in pain while flames melted their flesh and limbs or even entire bodies would be left completely incinerated. They would fall in the water and be left defenseless, to either drown or be picked up and carried to the nest as many were during the attacks on the island, including the chief's wife, never to be seen again. With little to no visibility and restricted movement against foes that hid like cowards and had free reign in the air there was no debating which side came out victorious.

Once again the hunt had failed, Berk's fighting force had been crippled and the nest's location remained a mystery. There was no winning that one-sided battle against the blasted dragon guard-hounds always there, waiting for them to stubbornly come again to try their luck in battle once more. No doubt the chief was boiling in anger over the casualties suffered this time around, the lives already lost and those soon to be lost to those horrid beasts that remained free to darken the skies a little longer.

"Right, I got it. Show you the way ta go home, yur tired an' ya want ta go t' bed." Gobber sung while picking up the basket that Stoick carried to relieve him slightly.

Stoick barely paid any attention and just continued to walk back up the walkways towards the village. He rudely bumped past several Vikings on his way up, not offering any sort of apology or even recognition towards them, but none of them really minded. It was one of the few times they ever showed sensitivity, to a man who obviously deserved it fighting for his life protecting his people and had nothing to show for it. They just focused on helping the other men in the boats, bringing them to the healers as quickly as they could while bringing in the boats for much needed repair.

"Gather the men, tell 'em ta come to the Great Hall," mumbled Stoick after a period of silence between them. "I need ta make an announcement."

"Of course, yur usual 'the dragons kicked our butts so let's figure out how ta get 'em back' speech." Gobber joked. "Sure ya got tha' one memorized by now."

"Gobber, will ya knock off the snips already!?" Stoick turned and shouted, catching the attention of more than a few of his burly men. He fixed Gobber with a stony glare that would have made any other man shrink down to the size of a speck of dust, but the smith's personal connection to his chief provided some form of resistance. "Those filthy devils were toyin' with us out there! They picked our boats off one by one!" He gestured out to the sea in the direction of Helheim's Gate, where the horrid creatures were no doubt roaring and screeching in mockery of them at this very moment. "I don't know about you, but I'm not about to stand idly by while my people's lives are toyed with the same way!"

Gobber stared back in boredom for a second or two and sighed in frustration over Stoick's scolding. "Look, Stoick, we go through this every time: you going ta find the nest, only ta come back with fresh wounds ta lick and a need ta yell at everybody. Mind me if I find the whole thing a bit overdone."

Stoick only scoffed and walked away, not needing any more of Gobber's lip, or anyone's for that matter. He stopped and stared up at the top of the cliffs â€“ there he could see all of the children who had gathered to see their parents come home, or to see if they had even survived.

It was a half and half ratio, some happy once they spotted their fathers climb out, some devastated to see that theirs were missing and bowing their heads down in sorrow. It broke Stoick's heart to see that these children had no room for naivetÃ© and knew all too soon of death, robbed of their parents and proper childhoods. It was never easy to have to announce the names of those who had died and see the grieving faces of their families, nor was it easy to plan all the funerals and build the pyres for all those noble souls to grant them safe journey to Valhalla.

The little good that came out of it was how it renewed both the resolve in the men that remained to fend off the dragons, and instilled a new sense of it in the children, who vowed to avenge their loved ones and destroy as many dragons as they could. He looked

up at all those children and saw not saddened faces and broken hearts, but the next generation of protectors of Berk, warriors who would rise in their place and continue their tribe's great legacy.

But speaking of children, there was one who didn't stand among them, one missing from the crowd. Stoick felt that familiar headache coming on again looking at a random spot where he should have been.

He sighed as Gobber walked up behind him. "All right, where is he?"

"You'll havtae be a bit more specific than tha.'"

"Hiccup." Stoick growled, his mind immediately assuming the worst of whatever hijinks he had gotten into. "Where is he, what's he up to now?"

"Geez, yu make it sound like he's committed high treason. Relax, he's probably back at the house takin' a nap or something."

"You mean you left him alone!?" Stoick shouted in anger at the smith. "Gobber, what were you thinking, leaving him unattended like that?"

"You know it wouldn't kill ya ta have a lit'l more trust in yur kid; he's not a baby, you know. Really, how much trouble do you think he'll get in by sleepin?" As much disdain as Gobber had for kids, he did think that they were smart enough to make the right choices on their own. After all, he himself was a child once, and he remembered when he had to learn to stand on his own two feet. If they made mistakes, then they would simply learn and move on, it was just a part of the process of growing up. He found it rather ridiculous that he understood that better than most fathers around here, but to Stoick's credit, he wasn't exactly the most exemplary parent.

"That's not the point, Gobber. Why is he alone in the house and not doin' his job over at the forge?"

"Ah, well, I had ta make him take a few days off." Gobber sheepishly rubbed his head with his now paddle-hand, earning a confused glare from Stoick. "He hasn't exactly got his head in his work lately, been daydreamin' inta the wee hoursâ€¦"

"In other words, he's been shirking his responsibilities." Stoick said, shaking his head and running a hand down the exhausted features of his middle-aged face.

"Well, let's not go overboard hereâ€¦ ah, Stoick!" Gobber tried to stop Stoick, but the chief was already marching off up the pathways and back into the village, heading towards his house. Today had already been enough of a migraine for Stoick, the last thing he needed to hear about was his son's lackadaisical attitude in regards to his work. These days his son had been nothing but problems: first his recklessness, then his disobedience, and now this. Stoick had hoped he could avoid this at least until the boy's teenage years, where now these problems were sure to only increase tenfold. It was about time that boy got straightened out, he thought.

* * *

><p>Just as Gobber had said, Hiccup was sound asleep in his bed, the blanket pulled up and covering him right up to his shoulder blades to warm his whole body. Gobber had suggested that he might have been working too hard based on how he wasn't able to pay attention to his duties in the shop, and so suggested that he take a nap to relieve himself. Hiccup was more than happy to comply, especially after hearing from a couple of passing women that the Berk armada had been spotted. He was in no mood to see his father at that moment, especially when all the man had to offer these days was harsh criticism and bitter attitude that so perfectly reflected his name.<p>

He just wanted to keep his thoughts focused on Toothless and the magical flight they had shared together. Any thoughts or memories regarding his Night Fury were sanctuary to him, protecting him from the cold torment the village provided him. He was able to avoid Snotlout for today, probably due to the older child hiding in his house still shaking over nearly being blown to smithereens by a dragon.

Luckily, no one believed him or the twins about the attack, which by extension meant they didn't believe anything about Hiccup being in the woods with them â€“ probably just some ploy to get attention, they figured. But memories of other days when the boy had pounded on his little body threatened to poison his happy dreams, and clinging on to thoughts of Toothless was the only way to shelter himself. He clenched his eyes ever so slightly, and fidgeted to try and shake the bad thoughts away as much as he could to keep the dreams of Toothless and the sky going as long as he could.

He dreamed of the two of them gliding through a velvety forest of cloud placed upon a dark blue sky brightened by the warm sunrise that peeked through and gently touched his skin. He could feel at peace between the soft rays and the crisp morning breeze that filled his lungs and refreshed his energy to its greatest peak. They charged through a row of smaller clouds, breaking holes through each one in billowing, soundless crashes that scattered the condensed air. The two could both feel the sudden rush of icy moisture on their faces snapping their eyes open and instantly drying, while their bodies caught onto remaining trails of cloud that dissipated soon after.

Toothless banked and spiraled around a rather large formation, curving and cutting through the surface by the very base of his wing. The skimming movement created a trail of smoke thin and nearly invisible, the precision in how the formation of clouds remained pristine astounding Hiccup at his dragon's great control of his flight.

They made a game of leaping through the thinner clouds, making each one a pretend safe zone that Toothless would leap off of and land safely on the next. He would crouch his paws in and wiggle his tail and behind, then swoop over in a mock jumping fashion with a beat of his large black wings and flap in place descending safely down on an adjacent 'platform.' It was like a fun game of hopscotch or leap frog in the sky, Hiccup laughing cheerfully as he bounced along on Toothless's back and especially when he looked back and saw the little Night Fury's tail wag happily along before pouncing

forward.

The boy would count the clouds as they went on or make up funny little rhymes about past Vikings and their exploits against dragons in lighthearted fashion. Most of his rhymes seemed to recount Bork the Bold and his numerous misfortunes caused by pesky dragons stealing his food and making fun of him.

At the last smaller cloud before another great mass, they leaped ahead again, Toothless's belly brushing against the weedy wisps at the very top. Their gaseous yet somewhat solid mass tickled his belly and the dragon rumbled with a noise akin to laughter, swiping down with his claws to catch the meddlesome things. His eyes by now were dilated into two perfect black orbs with the roundness of the full moon in the night sky. He even lolled out his tongue and joyfully let it flap in the air, the sound of his flapping gums catching Hiccup's ears.

Finally they crossed the bank, exposing to their view miles and miles of sparkling blue seawater, a soft yellow hue revealing the waves blown in the breeze. Hiccup's eyes were arrested to the water's movement, his eyes reflected and traced every single wavelet, and painted a permanent picture in his mind of that stunning ocean drawn from his memories of the real world.

The wind that blew his hair back continued to sound in his ears as he held tight onto Toothless's neck and lowered down, holding and rubbing him lovingly in gratitude. Even in a dream, it still seemed so beautiful, so remarkably realistic the lines between dream and reality themselves just blurred like the line dividing sea and sky.

For a fleeting moment, Hiccup believed it was real, that it was the only thing that was ever real, Berk and the pressures and problems he faced therein having been some great illusion or prolonged nightmare. Every part of his life now had only ever been the days with Toothless, his life having only ever started the day they met and together touched the realm that man could not reach. The dawn and the sky it was set upon were the first things he had ever seen, the clouds and wind being the first things he ever felt. Hiccup felt more alive now than he ever had before, his body twitching with pure energy, and he wanted to scream to the world that he was here, he himself.

At that moment of epiphany, things had changed, gone in a complete reverse direction from the tranquility of mere seconds ago. The sky and clouds inverted in color, the sky becoming a disturbing shade of red orange while the clouds turned pitch black. Hiccup's excitement had suddenly turned to caution and fear, trying to puzzle what was suddenly happening to his perfect new world. Toothless had wondered the same, his head darting back and forth to puzzle out what had become of their aerial paradise to this warped opposite.

The clouds suddenly started to burn away, flames evaporating the once-luminescent and enjoyable formations away. The flames rose up and consumed them, leaving nothing but blazes in the sky that had little to burn but empty air. The sky, in the meantime, had holes forming in random parts of it, widening out with the edges flickering with the dangerous, familiar light of the surrounding blazes. That empyrean space seemed to be a simple tapestry or a sheet of paper

that had been held to a candle and broken through. The lights of purgatory surrounded them from all around, reminding Hiccup of the raids on his island when the dragons burned through one home after another, then the catapults, the fences, and even the grass. The stars would be completely lost from view, at least they would be to anyone who was watching and not fighting for their life or in his case, hiding in the Great Hall or their house praying for it to end. Hiccup looked down and saw that even the ocean's original azure color was gone, turned black to resemble oil or tar. All around him, his dream world was being shattered; where once he wanted to scream his confident spirit out, now he just wanted to scream.

Toothless's sharp cry of alarm turned him forward to perhaps the most disturbing part yet. From a field of hovering fire before them, a massive figure started to rise. It must have reached to be at least 25 stories high, some human-shaped monstrosity from within the cloud itself. The giant seemed to be a dark shadow coated in flame, or perhaps it was Hiccup's eyes trying to adjust in between the irksome flying sparks and the body itself was actually made of fire.

When its face finally showed himself, Hiccup gasped to see the startling resemblance to a Viking face. A beard crafted from a raging inferno connected to a contrastingly stone-cold face with hollow, haunting, pupil-less eyes. The horns attached to the helmet he wore were lit like the torches used to survey the skies over Berk come nightfall, rising up with emotionless rage to alert the warriors to signs of the enemy approaching.

What drew the full attention of Hiccup and his dream Toothless, however, was the belly of this ghoulish apparition. On its stomach was a menacing visage that appeared similar to the stone totems in front of the island, which had remained lit for countless decades. Two empty holes for eyes above a gaping maw lined with razor sharped teeth too reminiscent of a wild dragon's or wolf's. Its snout was extended out with upturned nostrils to reflect the prideful, arrogant nature of most Vikings. Toothless seemed to be drawn in by the size of the jaws yet completely frozen in place; it was all the little dragon could do to flap his wings and keep himself airborne. There seemed to be no chance of escape, no way for either himself or Hiccup to come out alive.

And Hiccup was feeling the same way â€“ he was too shaken, too terrified to even move or speak; he wanted to cry but felt his voice seized within his throat. A squeak or whimper would be all he could manage now at best. He could just feel both sets of eyes and their seeming omnidirectional gaze bear down upon him completely, declaring with thunderous force and volume enough to spur the seas and shatter the earth.

'_**EyÃ°a**__**â€¦**__** EyÃ°aâ€¦ EyÃ°aâ€¦**__**'**_

The giant drudgingly raised up its fist and attempted to reach out to trap the two, crushing them and incinerating their tiny bodies. Hiccup was the first to snap out of the morbid trance and desperately tried to shake Toothless out of it as well, grabbing him by his tiny little ear flaps and yanked and shook them as hard as he could. The dragon would not move, however, his mouth hung open like his jawbone had broken. Hiccup tried to scream, but was shocked to find there was no sound whatsoever; save for the ambient noises in the background, the world inside this dream was completely mute now.

The hand fell further and further, at a drudgingly slow pace but with pressure emitted by the mass of the oversized appendage breaking the flaming air around them. Hiccup panicked; even a finger pressed down would be enough to crush them, especially when that finger was large enough to fit into the entire cove. The more he tried to shake Toothless, the firmer the dragon held in place, his fear too strong, the sweltering heat of the flames finally reaching them in full and triggering the drops of sweat to fall from Hiccup's face. The shadow closed in, and Hiccup braced for the impactâ€¦

Until Toothless finally managed to shake himself back to his senses, and they dived down, just seconds before the hand reached them. Still it continued to pursue them, the two of them able to see the shadow growing larger and larger upon the water's surface. Toothless folded in his wings to gain greater speed, employing the dive-bomb tactics that his kind were known for, and instantly the two accelerated. Still though, they could feel the heat from the fire, Hiccup finding it harder to breathe with each second and hyperventilating to bring in every little bit of air he could. He looked back to see the clenched hand ready to crash on top of them at any moment, and could not for all the might he could muster bring himself to look away from it.

Finally they had reached the water, and Toothless, with a lack of options, simply dove right into the water, the giant's hand coming very soon after.

But instead of the dark murkiness beneath the water that he expected, Hiccup found himself falling through a completely overcast sky. It was a gloomy, lifeless gray all around, not a single speck of blue anywhere to be found in contrast to the beginning. There was light, coming from the far off distance, but it just barely managed to break through the apparent wall the formation seemed to be.

What struck Hiccup as odd was that unlike in either of the two settings, there was no sense of temperature, hot or cold; in fact there wasn't any wind at all. He also found his body weighed down by some unknown compressive force, seemingly multiplying his normal, previously insignificant body weight a thousand times over. He could barely move in the air at all, save for a sparse wiggle or two from his arms. It truly was strange to fall from the sky and yet still feel like he was completely submerged underwater as he expected to be after his life-threatening situation.

Finally he landed, rolling over on his back, not feeling any pain or injuries at all despite having fallen what seemed to be a hundred feet. He opened his tightly shut eyes and looked up to see that the sky was not there, obscured by a ceiling of pure white. Looking around, he was completely surrounded by white, in what looked to be a long hallway of polished stone with columns orderly standing out at the sides. Hiccup felt deeply impressed at the usage of stone in the construction, never seeing anything other than wood used as building material before in his life. It gave the place a more refined appearance, a sort of elegance that spoke of a great importance.

The hall, at that moment, was completely quiet, not a sound to be heard, and no signs of activity whatsoever; it seemed to be completely abandoned. Hiccup felt strangely scared at the sense of solitude in this mysterious place, all too used to noise and calamity

like that in his village. Whether it be laughing children, shouting adults, or squealing animals, or sounds like the ocean or chirping birds, there was always something to indicate the liveliness of Berk.

He turned all around and noticed something rather important, and that was that he was all alone in this hallway. Toothless had completely disappeared around the time they dove into the water, and now he was on his own. Hiccup frantically looked for his friend, racing down the hall to see if his dragon had fallen in another area. He prayed to all the gods he knew, Odin, Thor, Tyr, whoever came into his mind, that Toothless was alright and he would not have to be on his own in here.

As he ran, he couldn't help but feel that sense of great importance he noticed when he first looked at the hall. That sense had grown stronger, now that he had prayed to the gods for help in finding Toothless, his mind fitting the two pieces together and defining his strange emotions with logical assumption or at least reasonable explanation.

This placed seemed special in aâ€¦ sacred sense, a hallowed area radiating with mystique and reverence; chaos and order, light and darkness were brought together in painting the halls a blank, neutral ivory. Each step, each clack of his leather boots against the stone floor shattered out like a lightning strike summoned forth by Thor's mighty hammer. Hiccup could feel the power of the divine flowing through every inch of this hall, though its true identity remained a complete unknown to him.

Hiccup hardly noticed his pace slow down while he pondered just what this place could be to give off such an air of veneration. He naively thought if maybe this was where the gods lived, but his thoughts were interrupted as he came to a massive door. It may have been only about half the size of the fiery giant that he escaped beforehand, but the designs carved upon the surface did not make it any less eye-catching. Around its perimeter were thousands of runes of a language vaguely similar to their own yet completely unreadable. On each door was a depiction of a warrior riding a dragon, reminding Hiccup of the dream he had before where he saw the black armored rider flying on another dragon, a grown-up Night Fury. The rider's face was completely masked, giving Hiccup no clue as to whether or not it was really him like he thought.

A loud creak sounded as the door slowly opened wide, bringing Hiccup to a rotunda, colored stark white just like the hall before it. There were white columns surrounding them, but there were no walls behind this time, giving Hiccup a clear view of the gloomy sky he had fallen through prior to landing in the hall. All he saw was sky, though, leaving the boy to wonder just how up this place was not to see any buildings outside or perhaps if the clouds were so thick the rest of this strange place was veiled behind them. The edge of the room was lines with a thin, metal fence, probably to keep any that entered this room from falling off the edge. At the bottom edges of the domed ceiling were small statues of dragons, their heads and torsos finely crafted and pointed up straight at the top. Hiccup recognized each one as one of the common dragons like those that the Vikings fought, and even those resembling breeds he saw in the Book of Dragons, yet there were other breeds he wasn't able to recognize in the slightest.

A soul rebornâ€¦ a dormant strengthâ€¦

Hiccup quietly walked forward to a table in the center of the room, a circular one littered with metal pieces. There were bolts and screws and all types of fastening components, mixed together with larger parts, rods, strings and barrels. There were two little dragon wings apart from each other, along with a hilt crafted in the shape of a dragon mouth, designed similarly to the boats his tribe sailed upon and a little dragon head round yet flat. The largest pieces there appeared to be pieces of a sword, cut into segments and split in half, the steel designed with ornate runes and painted in shades of white and black. The edges of the blades were segmented and seemed to be able to open up, making Hiccup think that something was supposed to go inside it.

He took one of the blade pieces, what looked to be half of the sword's tip, and his mind flashed back to the dream. When the fire-lit sword appeared in his mind, how it lit when he grabbed it; the flames died out and he could see the blade in full. The image was hazy though, and seemed to blur and black out very quickly, disappearing as soon as it came.

A will solid as steel, torrid as flameâ€¦ power given formâ€¦

The dream shows the wayâ€¦

Was he supposed to put the sword together? Hiccup questioned as he looked down at the pieces all sprawled out. He felt highly unconfident that he could craft what looked to be a highly complex weapon, especially when he had only started making daggers at the forge. How was he supposed to know how all these pieces fit, where each one went, how they were supposed to work? It just seemed impossible, there was no way he could do it.

All these voices that told him such things, that he was no good, that surely he'd find some way to mess it up, they sounded remarkably similar to the Berkians. Snotlout, the twins, Spitelout, Astrid, his father, and many, many more, all reminding him that he was only good at making mistakes. As if he could make craft such a blade, one that could make others burn with envy and make their own swords like cheap toys in comparison.

But another voice, one that sounded his own, small and meek yet booming out to silence the other voices of doubt, told him he should at least try.

* * *

><p>Hiccup finally woke up with a gasp after being seemingly trapped in his dream, snapping his eyes open at last. He sat up straight in his bed, panting heavily and looking around to find himself back in his room, the shadows indicating it was only a little ways into the afternoon. He gripped his blanket in response to the memories of the uncontrollable chain of events occurring in his imagination, surprisingly clear, as if it was all being replayed in front of him. The familiar sight of his room just blurred out as he stared off into space.<p>

Until he was snapped back to attention by a series of loud slams upon

his closed door, someone on the other side eagerly wanting to get in. Hiccup though for a moment it might have been Goober, needing his help at the forge with some last minute duty or a rush of customers needing their weapons repaired. He was sadly mistaken when he heard the person's voice from behind, fraught with frustration.

"HICCUP! OPEN THIS DOOR RIGHT NOW!"

It was his father, he was back from the hunt, and his anger was suggestive at how he had predictably once again failed. Hiccup could not have guessed just what he was mad at him for this time â€“ it seemed any little thing he did was enough to make his chieftain father blow his top nowadays. All he knew was that he did not want to be around to find out.

"HICCUP, I'M WARNING YOU!"

The blows upon the door seemed to grow much more forceful, threatening to break the door down off its hinges. It ended up going that far anyway as Stoick finally rammed the door down with his shoulder, expecting to find his lazy child dozing off when he should be at the forge, working; oh the lecture he would give if that were the case. But instead of a boy sleeping cozily in his bed, Stoick found the room completely abandoned, the blanket pulled away hurriedly. Stoick looked around to see if Hiccup was hiding anywhere in the room, but found nothing.

Hiccup had escaped as quickly as he could by climbing out of the window placed by his bed, then just jumped out to the ground below. He rolled in order to avoid any serious injury and made off for the forest. There was the only person he felt like talking to at the moment.

Hiccup was just laying atop Toothless' side, petting the dragon absentmindedly on the head in the cove. Toothless purred contently while laying his head on his paws, his tail curled up around his boy. As peaceful as they looked, Hiccup was in total distress, his mind reeling with a million questions all with no discernible answer.

"I just don't understand, Toothless. What was that place? How did I imagine it? All I think about these days is flying and suddenly I get warped to some weird building where I'm supposed to build the weirdest sword ever?" He just buried his face into Toothless' scales, gripping his hair so as to stop the pain of the headache squeezing his brain like a vice. Toothless lifted his head immediately sensing Hiccup's distress and gave him a soft lick and a coo, trying to tell his boy everything would be alright. Hiccup just sighed in frustration and let his hand fall limp to the ground.

"I don't know why I keep having these weird dreamsâ€¦" He spoke with his cheek pressed against the dragon's side. "What is it all supposed to mean, anyway?"

He remembered Gothi asking him if he had experienced any strange dreams but at the time he denied it because it didn't seem like an issue. He wasn't sure if the elder believed him; heck he hardly believed himself, but he was fairly confident. He figured that first one was just some out of place figment caused by stress or excitement getting to him. Hiccup had his doubts over this reasoning, instinct telling him it was or had to be something more, but one good overview

of the dream that more than half the things he saw were just too unbelievable to be real. Now, he wasn't really sure of anything anymore.

"Toothlessâ€¦ I've got a bad feeling about all thisâ€¦"

He sighed and let himself drift off to resume his nap, hoping this time he could just enjoy a normal dream.

* * *

><p>Review, favorite, follow! Next chapter is where things really heat up to a fever pitch!

8. Chapter 8

I'm sorry this one got in so late â€“ I fell a little behind with updates for my stories and business with finals. But here we are, the next chapter, and it's my longest yet.

And wow, 200 followers already, just from posting these admittedly rather depressing chapters! I can hardly wait until we get to the big stuff.

This chapter was based on a request from a reviewer, for Hiccup to have a final confrontation with Stoick of sorts. I wasn't planning on it when I planned out the plot, but I liked the idea, so here it is. So yeah, you can give some more suggestions, and I'll be willing to see what I can do to fit them in if I like them enough. Don't hate me too much, but here's where the angst rises up to dangerously high levels.

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* * *

><p>Hiccup was having a hard enough time as it was trying to see Toothless for the next couple of days, never finding time to sneak into the forest. He was always too worried his father would see him sneaking away, his actions only increasing the man's rage even further. Stoick was still heavily intent on delivering the lecture of a lifetime to Hiccup for his neglect of work at the forge and assumedly causing trouble. That annoyed Hiccup greatly, to think his father would just jump to conclusions about his being a pest to the other villagers.<p>

Hiccup had actually been working at the forge while hiding from his father, despite Stoick's opinions on his lackadaisical attitude. He was in his little workspace in the back of the forge, the spot Gobber had rented to him so he could have a nice quiet spot to work without someone yelling at him every five minutes. Hiccup loved this space, the walls decorated on every inch with pictures of ideas he had for machines, crude depictions of what they were and what their designated function was. The space was his own, a practical journey inside his mind where a plethora of ideas were being born each and every day. A candle was lit to provide the boy a sparse amount of light to draw with in the dark room, half-melted from previous use, illuminating the dark corners and highlighting inventions that were yet to be created. The shelves were lined with spare parts for use in

building these inventions, as well as a few books here and there explaining the mechanics behind different weapons and machinery such as the catapults that lined the perimeter of the island for defense against dragons. As a whole, it was a bit sparse and empty, but Hiccup figured ways on from now the room would be littered with other, newer, better ideas, ideas the others would have to recognize.

He was hard at work on another one of those ideas now, for a new machine, another invention of his that could benefit Berk somehow. He didn't care what anyone else said: he wanted to make a fair contribution to help improve life on Berk, and this was the only way he knew to do it. He was powerful in mind, not body, already showing prowess beyond his years; beyond his time period, really. He agreed that yes, his plans may have seemed a bit ambitious or crazy, but if people were just willing to give them a chance they could really change things around Berk for the better.

This machine in particular was designed to make planting crops a little easier for the farmers; it was a bouncing stick meant to quickly plant seeds with rotating canisters of dirt and water attached. The stick could dig a hole with the perfect amount of deepness and then eject a seed from the spring built within the tip of the metal piston into the ground, dispensing dirt to seal up the hole, then water it. His attempts at making dragon killing devices didn't go well, and now that he had a dragon for a best friend, Hiccup couldn't bring himself to make anything that could potentially make a dragon's life. Hiccup figured the next best thing was improving daily life; it was basically the same thing as before, doing something that was sure to make the people see his worth.

He had just finished calibrating the springs within the metal pole and was now attaching the canisters to the top near the handles when he heard a knock at the door. Hiccup was surprised at the gentleness of the knock â€“ it couldn't have been his father, who was breaking doors down with one good pound nowadays. It couldn't have been Gobber either â€“ the smith could never be that gentle, Hiccup sometimes wondering if he even knew what gentle was. So then whoâ€¦?

"Hiccup, what are you doing?" A young girl's voice asked. Hiccup groaned, it was Astrid. He said nothing and returned to his work, trying to ignore the continued knocks.

"Hiccup, I know you're in there. You better not be working on another crazy invention of yours, your dad's mad enough as it is." She pointed out. Again the boy ignored her, focused solely on getting his invention to work and not have a repeat of what happened the last time.

After the dream he had had the other day, with the giant flaming Viking figure, he didn't really want to deal with anyone right now. That, and the villagers hadn't exactly been very kind to him in recent memory. The latter alone wouldn't have been enough for him to isolate himself from everyone, but the former had left him with a feeling he couldn't place. A feeling of suspicion, maybe, like everyone around him suddenly wasn't trustworthy; he did question it, considering he had lived with these people all his life for the short amount of time it was and was mostly convinced they wouldn't try to do him harm. The evidence against his people was overwhelming though, and his nervousness around them had increased to a point beyond a

lack of happiness, where he simply no longer felt safe among them. He had considered speaking to Gothi about the matter and receiving her sage advice on what the dreams meant. The elder had asked if he had any strange dreams lately, and what he saw the previous nights definitely qualified. But he couldn't help but notice Gothi giving him a small flash of the evil eye, possibly sensing the connection to Toothless; Hiccup wasn't about to be interrogated like some criminal, so he put the matter aside.

Quickly getting frustrated, Astrid pounded on the door interrupting again, hard enough that she knew the irksome boy could hear her. "Okay, listen up! I have better things to do than check up on you like some nanny. So either you come out this door right now or I'll bust in and drag you out!" He better have come out in the next few moments or she was going to take her axe and hack the door open. She might get reprimanded by Gobber, but Hiccup was being too annoying for her to care anyway. Hiccup was the problem here, not her.

In the blink of an eye, the door was opened, revealing a very irritated Hiccup standing at the door, his face fixed in a scowl that, although rather soft compared to his elders, was very unbecoming of him. Astrid was surprised, but the look of anger on her own face did little to betray it. A second passed as they just stood there, staring at each other in pure annoyance, the tension practically choking them with airy hands. Hiccup was the one to break the silence and speak.

"What do you want?" He asked.

"I came to tell you your dad's looking for you, he wants to talk to you." Astrid said.

"Tell me something I don't knowâ€¦" said Hiccup as he prepared to go back to work. Astrid held back the door before he could close it completely and forced it completely open. The torrent of light from outside was blinding next to the singular flicker he had been working with for the past few hours. He winced from the sudden discomfort it brought upon his eyes.

"No, how about you tell me something I don't knowâ€¦" She stared angrily, "â€¦like why you've been avoiding him for the past couple of days? He's your chief â€“ when he talks, you listen."

Hiccup never turned to face her, instead he continued to work on his project, his arms fiddling around working with the components. He tried to tighten the screws which would fasten the canisters in place, Astrid's words driving his hand more than necessary. Others were expected to listen when his father spoke, but in the rare moments when he talked or simply given the chance to, the chief just cut him off. His words could never break that wall that fortified his father's thoughts, because there was no strength to back them in his opinion. Hiccup was not that ideal son his father wanted, so Stoick must have figured his thoughts just weren't listening to, and never would be until the boy could learn to walk, talk, act, and think like everyone else. Why his way of doing things, his thoughts of progress, were so terrible, he would probably never know.

"Well? Aren't you gonna say something?" Astrid asked, her anger flaring up to dangerous levels. "I'm not leaving until you give me an answer."

Hiccup only turned his head partway to spare her a glance, stopping his work and giving her his attention out of simple courtesy. "I thought you said you weren't my nanny. You don't seem to have any trouble acting like it."

Astrid's eyes widened briefly before narrowing them again in anger, pointing a finger of accusation straight at him. "Hey, I'm just trying to figure out what your problem is."

"MY problem!?" Hiccup asked incredulously, spinning around to face her in full, in total disbelief at her statement.

"Between these inventions and your running off and disappearing every day, you're already causing a lot of people headaches. Now there's this attitude to go with it all â€“ you'd think you'd show your people a bit more consideration than that."

Those words may as well have been a slap in the face to Hiccup, his heart feeling the sting as opposed to his cheek. His jaw was dropped to the ground and his arms fallen limply at his side, his bones left slack over her statement. Astrid, on the other hand, showed not a hint of remorse from her 'attack' on Hiccup; she meant what she said, with no more respect for their former friendship she honestly believed it. It was about time Hiccup had heard the truth about how much of a nuisance he was, but unlike Snotlout, she was going to do it the right way. No insults, no threats, just come out and say it, and if he felt bad, good. It would be all the more inspiration for him to get his act together and start learning to do things like he should be.

"All you do is cause problems; why can't you just help Gobber in the forge like you're supposed to!? Stop wasting time on these ridiculous ideas of yours and start doing something for you village!" She shouted.

Hiccup's fists clenched with white-turned knuckles and anger boiled over inside of him like broth set over the fire. No way was he going to let Astrid just insult him and his efforts like this; sure they didn't always turn out well, but his intentions should have at least shone through. Her arguments were completely unfounded, especially if all she had to look at were results â€“ he wasn't one to think of himself but he figured he deserved at least a little more than that. With a foot set forward he shouted, trying to stop any tears before they even had the chance to form.

"I am doing something for my village! That's all I've ever done!" He gestured back to the wall of pictures behind him hidden in the semi-dark room. "All my inventions, all these 'ridiculous ideas', everything; I come up with it all to try to help you guys! That's all I've ever wanted, to do my part, to be a Viking, to show I _can_ do things right, that I'm notâ€¦ 'Hiccup the Useless!' I don't need some lecture on responsibility from my father, which, by the way, you've already spared him the trouble of giving. Go ahead and tell him; I'm sure he'll give you a big pat on the back for that, and you can feel especially proud because that's more than he ever gave me!"

Astrid was unfazed at the boy's outburst; in fact it seemed Hiccup had said something that she was expecting him to spit out. She scoffed and crossed her arms and held herself in a dignified manner

just as any adult Viking like her parents or the chief would, blowing back her bangs. "And the truth comes outâ€¦"

"What?" Hiccup said.

"You're doing all this because you want to get attention from your dad; don't deny it, you just said so! I bet you're running off into those woods, even after he told you not to, and you're doing it anyway just to make him run in after you! Here I thought you might be a worthwhile chief, and here you are acting like a spoiled brat!"

"So what does that make you?" Hiccup asked, getting Astrid's astonished attention at last. She just gazed back at him frozenly while Hiccup continued on. "Your parents tell you to stop talking to someone and you just go along with it, no questions asked? They say it's for your future as a shield-maiden and you need to get rid of anything that might get in the way of that. If they told you to jump off of the side of the island 'cause of your future, would you do that too? You're just trying to please them, and my dad, and pretty much everyone else â€“ I know how hard you've been pushing yourself in training, and I know it's so they'll think more of you. You're calling me a spoiled brat, well you're just a-aâ€¦ lap dog!"

Just as he finished, he felt a hand grab him and shove him down to the floor, the hard stone colliding with his elbow and sending a sharp jolt of pain up his arm. That was all Astrid could take, all the insolence a little fishbone like him was going to give to her. Her parents were right, Hiccup was only going to be a hindrance to her just like he was to everyone else. Looking at him now, she could perceive his entire future, a life of incompetence, of embarrassment, of making things worse for everyone around him. From the moment she met him he had just held her back, wasted her time with foolish sentiment; she was a Viking, a shield-maiden, she was destined for greater things. She was going to be, no, she was already more than he could and was ever going to be.

"No oneâ€¦ calls me a lap dogâ€¦ especially not you." She growled dangerously at him, walking over to where he laid in a fetal position on the ground. She was towering over him while he held his elbow and easing the throbbing in his arm, but still felt the surges of discomfort slither down his arm. With a glare she spoke. "That was for the attitude."

She then walked off to his worktable and picked up one of the drawings he had just completed, the makeshift diagram of the bouncing planter. She turned back to Hiccup and coldly glared at him, holding up the paper to give him a good view. With cruelly slow speed, she tore the paper in half and tossed the remains down upon him, Hiccup only watching in shock as the pieces fluttered down to the ground.

"And thatâ€¦ was for everything else."

She walked back over to him and held up her heavy practice axe, releasing her grip and letting it fall down upon his side. He felt the wooden pole puncture him and he let out a sharp gasp, bringing his hand to his side to soothe the pain. Astrid just walked off leaving Hiccup to writhe â€“ that was the price he would have to pay for insulting her pride.

Gobber, who had just finished delivering repaired weapons to their owners, came in from the side of the forge, toting his now empty wheelbarrow. He managed to spot Astrid coming out from the opposite end, face fixed in a look of fury that could rival even Stoick the Vast's. With a cocked eyebrow he parked the wheelbarrow just outside the entrance and moved in. Pushing past the barrels of weapons still in need of repair and the shelves of tools with which to repair them in addition to weapon replacements, he found Hiccup. The boy laid there curled up on the floor just inside his workspace, trying to close himself in even further.

Gobber connected this to Astrid's foul mood as she was just leaving and sighed and shook his head. The boy obviously had done something to anger her â€“ not that that wasn't believable. Hiccup had a knack these days for driving people up the wall; the boy could drive even a passive sheep into a frenzy. It seemed he learned the hard way that Helheim had no greater fury than a woman scorned. The smith walked in and lazily scooped up the boy by the hem of his tunic, Hiccup just continuing to stare down.

"So, ya want ta tell me wha' exac'ly happened here?" Gobber asked.

Hiccup just held his head down to the ground, glaring bitterly to avoid showing the smith his pathetic appearance. Bruised and beaten, with pain that confirmed the silent warning of his dreams, he only spoke in a miserable, angry tone.

"No."

* * *

><p>A day of flying with Toothless the day after had left him in much better spirits for today, much more confident and prepared for the big moment. Though the skies above were overcast, looking as though it might rain, it did not affect his sunny spirits. He had completed the final touches on his device, making absolute certain that nothing could possibly go wrong, anticipating every possible problem and adjusting it for such, and now it was ready for its first test run. He let loose a breath of excitement from his nostrils, just letting the eagerness well up inside. He headed off to the fields just past the farmhouses, not letting the calm, chilling breezes signaling winter's approach slow down his pace.<p>

Hiccup dragged out his device underneath his arm, letting the bottom piston drag along and dig a trail in the ground, hefting it back up once it started to slip from his grasp. Passing Vikings who were running their errands, carrying wood, cloth, and scrap metal to repair the still broken ships or distributing food to the workers saw the trail and looked to see the boy with his new invention. Almost instantly a million cries of annoyance and exasperation were heard, blending together in one massive outcry of protest. Most people were just staring angrily at him, shouting to the point where their lungs could burst from the strain, but some were fed up enough to try and chase after him and try to rip the mechanical menace out of his hands before he could wreak as much havoc as he did with the last one. Noticing that he was headed off in the direction of the fields only made them quicken their pace, worried that his invention would end up devastating their food supply.

Hiccup took notice of the Vikings chasing him and ran off, going as fast as his legs could carry him while holding the large metal object. Luckily his size and his lack of fat enabled much greater speed from the young boy, but the weight of the planter and the fact that it kept slipping out of his arms only made things more difficult. They ran past several rows of houses, the number of Vikings in pursuit of him only increasing once others caught a glimpse of the planter and feared the worst. Hiccup had to move in between several houses to try and shake off the larger, burly men; his bone-thin body for once providing an advantage. He was able to gain a few feet more distance between him and then, inwardly sighing in relief while the men had to take the longer way down several paths. It gave him a little more breathing room once he'd finally reached the fields, having the chance to test out his invention before anyone else could interrupt him.

He set the planter upright while grasping onto the handlebars, placing his feet atop the foot pegs and trying to steady himself when it wobbled and tipped front and back. He pulled on the bars to pull it back when it tipped forward and placed his foot back on the ground and pushed it when it tipped back. Once he had gotten his balance aligned and his nerves straightened out, he began bouncing in place to test out the spring, and to his delight found it to be working efficiently. So fat things were going well; maybe he should have built things like this from the start.

The most important part of the test, where he could see if it could plant seeds, was about to get underway when the Vikings finally caught them. They wasted no time in trying to take the device and rip it to pieces before it could do any damage, heading straight for him with clenched hands ready to tear the infernal device apart. Hiccup gasped and fell back from the planter landing on his seat on the ground, just watching as they approached like a herd of wild boars. Worried his device would be destroyed before he even got the chance to see if it worked or not, he crawled over to the planter and sat atop it, holding out with his hands and crying with as much force as he could muster.

"WAIT!"

The crowd stopped, just inches apart from him, looking no less angry and apprehensive as they did mere moments ago. Hiccup stood from his position, taking up the planter by the handles and holding it upright while leaning it on his shoulder. He gulped audibly looking at the sea of glares before him, feeling the bones in his knees turn to jelly and spikes jutting around inside his stomach. He always hated being the center of attention, having everyone look at him, especially with those eyes. It was one of the big reasons he didn't want to be chief, knowing that this was going to be common occurrence for him. Still, he had to prove that he was onto something, that his inventions could work, and he had already seen signs that they could, so he held his ground and spoke out.

"I-I knowâ€¦ my last invention didn't go wellâ€¦" and he was greeted by roars of anger and complaint to agree with him. Though he couldn't hear the words, some were stating that they still sported the scars from that arrow launcher, pointing to the stitched up wounds on their arms and stomachs that just narrowly missed their vital organs. "Butâ€¦ I know this one will! I've already done a little testing with

it, and it's working just fine. This one will work, I'm sure of it!"

"Bah!" Shouted one Viking. "What does that little runt know!? I say we smash the thing now before it does any damage!"

"I agree!" Shouted a female Viking. "You've seen what that last contraption o' his did! He's practically lendin' the dragons a hand in killin' us off!"

"I'm not trying to kill anyone!" Hiccup shouted, offended that they would think he would purposefully try to do them harm. "This isn't even a war device! You use it for planting seeds, and it'll do it a lot faster; just let me show you how it works!"

The Vikings all looked to each other â€“ admittedly some seemed a bit bored after hearing the device's intended function. Their penchant for war and violence and their culture's heavy emphasis around it left them not entirely interested in anything that wasn't related to killing dragons. On the other hand, some were still skeptical that something could go wrong: as handy as that planter sounded, it was a Hiccup-invented item â€“ enough could be said about that, and more than enough had. In silent consensus, the villagers decided overall to give the boy's invention a look at: they could worry about cleanup once the damage had been done. The crowd backed away to give the boy space to work, perhaps a few steps too many, in fear of the planter going rampant and willing to preserve themselves a few more years. From gaps in between the adults, some of the children started coming out, including Fishlegs, Snotlout and the twins who were already laughing at him, and Astrid. The girl gave him a hard glare and crossed her arms, just waiting with silent anticipation for the boy to once again make a fool of himself.

Seeing the kids his age and their enjoyment at his being put up on the spot stoked the fires of determination in him. With a glare locked with Astrid's he set himself upright on the planter once again, and began hopping in place once more. Some of the villagers' gazes actually started to soften, the device appearing for now like it was completely harmless. Hiccup had hardly noticed, keeping his attention fixed upon his current task.

"The way it works isâ€¦ you bounce a hole into the ground for the seeds to be planted in." The piston bounced and dug into the soft earth, each hop applying Hiccup's meager weight into it, though the boy pressed down hard to compensate for this. With each bounce, the hole grew deeper and deeper, the tip sinking further in while the dirt around was pulled into the radius of the hole. After about three bounces, the hole had been rendered deep enough to continue.

"Then, with a press of a button, the seed gets planted into the ground." True to word, he pressed a button on the left handlebar, engaging the spring within the metal rod. With another bounce down, the tip ejected a small vegetable seed into the soil, revealed to the crowd once he bounced away. Though the mood was still something to be desired, a few people had given nods of approval at seeing the effectiveness of the device. It did seem like it could be helpful, the farmers in the crowd blissfully imagining how quickly their work could be done with this device.

"And now you cover up the seed and water it." He twisted back the

other handlebar, engaging the wheel where the canisters were attached. The first canister dispensed a mound of dirt that plugged up the hole with a plop, evenly covering the hole to give no indication that it had ever been dug in the first place. The wheel then rotated and the second canister dispensed a small shower of water to nourish the seed.

Hiccup could barely contain his delight and excitement seeing his invention working properly. It was doing exactly what it was intended to do, even as the minutes rolled by and he had planted more seeds in. The crowd of Vikings watching was starting to lighten up, some were actually smiling seeing his device at work, gazing at its results in wonder and whispering words of praise to their nearby neighbors. It was all Hiccup could have wanted: for once the Gods were smiling down upon him, granting him good fortune. All of the darkness and sadness of the past couple months blown away in the happiness flooding through him, the exhilarating feeling like a blizzard with winds powerful enough to tear stone from the earth. The feeling was so strong it could almost match with the day Toothless took him flying into the air, though nothing could ever truly surpass that incomparable joy even the memory alone seemed to give. He could see this was only the beginning: now that people had finally recognized his genius, they could build more of his devices, more inventions to help the village. They could build machines to harness the wind, the water, all of nature for everything from agriculture to even their defenses; Hiccup didn't want to kill dragons, but he figured he could still help fortify the village from the raids. They could grow more food, be better prepared for the harsher months, and finally be able to build their homes more nicely, maybe even with more solid material like stone. He could see it now, a better, more advanced Berk that would be the envy of all the other islands, oh the elation his father would feel. Hiccup could almost hear his father actually say the words, 'son, I'm proud of youâ€¦'

But that might have been too much for some, knowing that Hiccup was going to be the star of the village. The other kids were still staring at him with looks of disgust, Astrid and Snotlout specifically; it was ridiculous that Hiccup was actually going to get recognition for his stupid machines. If he was going to get people to respect him, it should have been because he did things properly like the rest of them; he should have earned it for his skill as a warrior, his strength, with the head of a dragon as his trophy. On any island, in any tribe, that was what counted most: how strong you were and how many dragons you killed, and what kind â€“ that was what defined the greatest, most honorable Vikings. That was how real Vikings like his father got to the top and made people admire and even worship him so. That was what Astrid thought, at least.

For Snotlout and the twins, it was just stupid seeing Hiccup be congratulated simply because he was Hiccup. The boy wasn't worth respect in any form or on any level, he was a worm compared to them â€“ they were the perfect Vikings, they were the ones who should be praised, for being everything Vikings should have been. They who stood on a higher level compared to people like him, Snotlout especially. The large boy turned back and sneered at the crowd looking on in awe in Hiccup when it was clear, to him, that those gazes should have been pointing in his direction. He should be treated like a king for all the evident virtues he possessed, and yet they were gawking at some stupid twerp on a bouncing stick planting seeds.

Tuffnut was chuckling next to his sister, a wicked, demented grin on his thin face, hunched back with a pile of rocks in his hand. "Hey, bet I can nail that stupid stick dead center." He whispered to his sister, tossing the rocks in his palm.

"You're onâ€¦" Ruffnut whispered back.

Tuffnut reeled his hand back ready to toss the rocks, catching the attention of little Fishlegs. The chubby boy gasped; he felt he should have said something or grabbed Tuffnut's hand to stop him before it was too late. It would have been the least that he owed Hiccup for never bothering to lend him a hand in the previous months when Snotlout and the twins beating him up. But looking over at Snotlout now, he realized he ran the risk of getting picked on, of being ridiculed like Hiccup was. Fishlegs was too timid, too sensitive to handle all that abuse that he put his own cousin through each and every day; it was the reason he never bothered to help Hiccup at all. This time was no different; the boy just covered his eyes and prepared for the worst.

The stone shot through the air and collided right with the main rotational gear the canister were attached to. The impact had managed to knock a few gears loose inside, causing the spring connected to the piston to go out of control. Hiccup was now bouncing wildly all over the field, desperately clinging on to the handlebars for fear of falling off. The bounces were now much stronger, each one taking Hiccup up at least ten feat in the air and rising. He was tearing the field apart, splattering crumbs of dirt everywhere, the Vikings shielding themselves from the onslaught of sprayed soil.

The now-dysfunctional planter was bouncing straight for the crowd of Vikings, who all quickly broke apart and ran for cover while Hiccup yelled and screamed for dear life. Grabbing onto the dispensers he accidentally caused them to activate, squirting out soil and water in large amounts all over the villagers. The pressure burst the nozzles on the dispensers, even breaking their restraints and sending them flying through the air. People screamed in panic and fled for shelter while everything quickly descended into chaos, but in the midst of his own distress, Hiccup could see the other kids down below. Astrid was still glaring at him, mocking him through her gaze alone, while Fishlegs just covered his head to try and avoid the mess. Snotlout and the twins, however, were on the ground rolling around and laughing their heads off, delighting in his torment. Hiccup could see the spare rocks in Tuffnut's hand while the weasel clenched his chest to keep himself from laughing so much: he was the culprit.

The planter bounced through the town, going so high it landed on the rooftops of multiple houses and crashed through to the inside. Upon landing, he'd bounce straight up and out of the house only to crash down again and break a new hole in. With some houses it crashed down right on the support beams causing them to topple over themselves. Three houses ended up suffering this fate, and the owners were none too happy, even when Hiccup apologized.

Once he descended once more, Hiccup felt a strong hand tug at his backside and easily wrench him away from the planter, now shooting off on its own. Looking back he could see his father's red beard and even redder face focused on the machine. With a toss of his weapon in the air and a single glance for aim, he hurled a double-edged axe

towards the machine; the blade spun through the air and collided with the planter, anchoring right in its main pole and sending it to the ground in a bent and crumpled heap. Turning around to face the crowd he shouted:

"What in Thor's name is goin' on!?"

The crowd all just turned to glare at Hiccup, the weight of their hundreds of stares of fury crashing down on him like a boulder to the head. Hiccup panted for breath and gazed up at his father, and never had he seen the man so angry in his life. Veins were actually forming along the sides of his face and his cheeks were so red it would have made blood seem colorless. He was huffing through his nostrils like a dragon prepared to blast its fire, and Hiccup anticipated a very similar occurrence from the chief.

"Of courseâ€¦" He said tiredly but with as much control as possible, but Hiccup could feel the maelstrom of anger just waiting to be unleashed. Stoick stormed off with Hiccup in tow, the boy's last glance being of the amused children behind him.

* * *

><p>The door of the Haddock household opened wide for Hiccup to be tossed down hardly onto the floor. Collapsing onto the wood, he ignored the flash of pain to look up at the angry grizzly bear of a man that was his father. He stood over Hiccup like a looming shadow, yet Hiccup could see the flash of anger in his seemingly glowing eyes of rage and shame. Hiccup cowered back slightly in the face of his, not his father at this moment, but his chief, backing along the floor with eyes widened with fear.<p>

To say Stoick was utterly enraged was the understatement of perhaps the millennium; the man was ready to explode in a cataclysmic burst of fire and engulf the entire island. Hiccup had blatantly disobeyed his orders to do his assigned work in the forge and instead had created another one of those miserable machines of his, and once again caused trouble with it. If Hiccup was half as smart as he thought he was, then surely he would have been able to see the consequences of his actions. He knew the boy was naÃ¯ve, even reckless, but this counted as outright stupidity. This boy in front of him was clearly a threat to himself and to others, and for a moment Stoick wondered if this child with all his dangerous thoughts would not be satisfied until the entire island would be destroyed. For his own sake, the boy had better have had a good explanation for his dangerous behavior, the chief thought.

"Well, out with itâ€¦!" Stoick snapped.

Hiccup could not bring himself to look at his father, too scared to think, to move, to even breathe. He kept his gaze locked on the floor and stayed completely silent, wishing he could just vanish completely. Silence was not the answer Stoick was expecting though, sadly.

"Do you enjoy making a fool of me?" Stoick asked, a furious growl in his tone. "Defying my orders left and right? Tarnishin' our name with your childish lunacy? What have I done to make you ignore my every word?" Again, Hiccup did not speak; really, he did not know what he could say.

"Let me tell you somethin', boy. When I was your age, I had much greater discipline; I obeyed my father to the letter, followed his every word, he told me to smack someone in the face, I said 'how hard?'" Stoick ranted, going on and on about his perfect childhood; Hiccup had to hold himself back with all his might to keep himself from groaning. It was, after all, only about the twentieth time this month he had heard it. "I never questioned him, even his most nonsensical commands, and it was because of that loyalty that I was able to win his respect and become one of the greatest warriors this island has ever seen. You, on the other hand, clearly know nothing of obedience and in turn you continue to disappoint me. Tell me, Hiccup, what will it take for you to understand that neither I nor this tribe will not accept failure?"

Hiccup did understand, it was one of the greatest driving forces behind his actions, what fueled his thoughts while building both the arrow launcher and the planter. He had to make sure everything was perfect, that nothing could possibly go wrong, and he was willing to accept the overwhelming pressure that came with it. To him his father's dedication to his grandfather was nothing short of blind loyalty, doing something that in all common sense you knew was ludicrous, so he'd tried to handle things differently. He wanted to prove that things could be done even if it wasn't in the Viking way, that there was nothing wrong with doing things differently and failure was only avoided by following one path. That belief that he could compensate for his weakness in this manner, still drove him, even now as he dared to gaze partly at his father.

"I-I tried to help. Itâ€¦ it was working..." Hiccup squeaked.

Stoick's slight glance at him prodded him to continue, and with a strong gulp, he did. "It was s-supposed to p-p-plant seeds faster, and itâ€¦ it was w-workingâ€¦ But then Tuffnutâ€¦" His fingers dug into the wood in anger at the dimwitted bully's act of sabotage. "He threw a r-rock at it, and that's wha-"

"AGAIN with this!? Blaming others for your mistakes?" Stoick shouted. "I know for a fact I raised you better than that, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III! This selfish behavior of yours is completely unacceptable and I will stand for it no longer!"

There it was again; he was making himself bleed for this entire village, for this man in particular, and someone was calling him selfish. The fact that Snotlout and the twins could blame anything on him and get away with it scot-free was beside the point. Here his chief was now, insulting all his efforts, throwing them onto the ground just as he did with him and spitting on them. Now it was Hiccup's turn to be angry; never mind how it ended with Astrid, he wasn't going to let anyone get away with it. He was a human just like these people and he deserved to be treated fairly like they were.

"Noâ€¦ no, youâ€¦ you don't get to say that. Not you, not after everything I've done!" He growled.

"And just what _have_ you done? Making a mess of the village, injuring people and destroying their homes, ruining our food supply and neglecting your duties! You'd shame me further by saying this was

all done on my part, you'd make this my burden to bear?" Stoick asked.

"It's not always about you! I'm trying to help everyone and for some reason it's never good enough!" He shouted.

"How dare you speak to me like that!" Stoick roared back. "I am your chief, and you will show me proper respect!"

"So just being a chief means people have to respect you, or else? Does that mean people are gonna start respecting me once I'm old enough and I'm chief, as opposed to now when I'm trying to do what I can to make Berk better and I'm getting yelled at and bullied by everybody for it?" Hiccup asked.

Stoick scoffed and raised himself back up to stare down at his son, putting on that unseen cloak of arrogant authority that only the truly humble like Hiccup could see. "That day is quite far off, boy â€“ your actions have clearly proven that the honor of being chief is one you are far less than deserving of."

"Who even cares? Dad, I don't want to be chief!"

There, he said it, the thing he had been thinking of for the longest time. Hiccup had no intention of wasting his life sitting in some seat of power and letting it corrupt him to the point where he held himself so highly the earth could no longer be seen. He'd wanted to tell his father for the longest time that he was no leader and had no intention of being so to a bunch of jerks that openly mocked him daily either, and now it was out there. He felt bad that his father might be disappointed, he knew it was all the man could hope for him, but he wanted to live his own life and not be someone else's puppet. It took all the courage he had to muster to speak it as well, and Hiccup, though he held his stance, quickly felt the energy in his body running low, pouring his soul out into the words to increase their impact.

Stoick got the full force of it, though; he was floored, shocked beyond words that Hiccup wanted nothing to do with being chief, perhaps one of the greatest privileges a Viking could receive next to killing dragons. Hiccup probably didn't want anything to do with that either â€“ it was aggravating to the chief, his son stepping on tradition, denouncing such honors so easily. Right then and there, he felt like slapping the child in the face, and could feel the muscles in his arm tense in preparation to do so. Such a blow would send the child flying across the living room, but he didn't care; he raised his arm up ready to deliver the blow, and Hiccup winced upon noticing.

But his words beat his reflexes. "You have no rightâ€¦ you can't just throw it away. This is your birthright, Hiccup! It's not a matter of choice!"

"Yes it is! You said it's my birthright so it should be mine to do whatever I want with it! You can just give it to someone else; you and I both know practically everyone else here is better suited for the job!" Hiccup shouted.

"So you'd throw it onto someone else, ignoring your responsibility!? This isn't something you can just walk away from, you cannot just rid

yourself of your duties whenever you feel like it! A chief does not-"

"That's all you ever talk about, you don't care about anything else, not even me!" Hiccup countered, feeling his voice starting to break. "I do everything I can think of to try and make up for the way I was born. If I could change the way I look I would, but I can't, I just can't dad!"

"And now more excuses! Bah, disgraceful!" Stoick scoffed raising his hands up in defeat. "A chief does not get to complain about the unfairness of the world, he must seize justice with his own hands!"

"Well, I'm not-"

"A chief's duty is to his people, he must cast aside his own needs for theirs!"

"But-"

"A chief must be an example for his people, he must be unyielding, never showing weakness of any kind so that they will not succumb to hardship!"

"Will you please just-"

"A chief must be prepared to bear any pain for his people, protect them, be willing to pay any cost for them!"

"Can you let me-"

"You are going to be chief, and you are going to accept it gratefully! You are going to learn to act like a real Viking and cease thisâ€¦ thisâ€¦ being you!" Stoick ended finally, gesturing his hands out to signify his whole self, personality, interests, and all. "No more inventions, no more drawing, no more playing and gallivanting off doing whatever it is you do behind our backs, no more-"

"No more mistakes?" Hiccup said, outside of his father's knowledge repeating the very words he had used in his conversation with Gobber weeks earlier.

"Exactlyâ€¦ It's become obvious I haven't been training you hard enough and you've been getting' lazy because of all this freedom. That stops here and now: you'll be in the ring, ten hours a day, doing training that I've approved of." Stoick said, moving over to the fireplace and grabbing the war hammer that he had placed upon the mantle. He placed the object into Hiccup's hands, setting it upright when the boy teetered over from the weight of it. "I'm not about to let you throw our legacy aside because of your childish whims. You're a runt now, but when I'm done you will be the ultimate dragon slayer â€“ beasts and men will cower before you, you will be the strongest of them all. You will be a real Viking."

Hiccup just stared straight up at his father for the first time their argument had begun, and it was clear that Stoick had no intention of going back on his word. The man had predicted that his child would be the strongest of them all, even as Hiccup lay there, barely breathing

as an infant, so small it was questionable whether or not he would live. Valka certainly had her doubts, especially with the fact that he was born premature and she had been the one to hold him. But Stoick knew otherwise, he knew he would be the father of the greatest warrior the world had ever seen, he expected no less. Even now that that vision had become blurred with the pitiful growth his son had displayed, he still kept the image in his head. This was the destiny his son was meant to have, he was convinced of that.

Hiccup, on the other hand, wasn't; he just turned to look at the weapon in his hand, then to the axe secured in his father's belt. If his father had his way, then he would grow up to wield these same weapons coated in dragon's blood. He saw a glimpse of himself as an older man, one built just like his father, with a beard of auburn, muscles as hard as stone and a face riddled with scars, his eyes dulled from a life of carnage. He was standing in the cove where he and Toothless always met, under a sky filled with storm clouds, darkening the land below. There were scorch marks on the ground, and even some on his body, yet he felt no pain from them whatsoever. He looked around for any sign of Toothless, already being given a bad feeling from the stains of blood on his adult-sized tunic.

He turned around and there he saw the dragon, a sight that induced bile within his throat. There, lying in a pool of blood, limbs twisted and torn, wings shredded apart, was the young dragon. His face was frozen in mid-roar, his jaws opened wide and his slitted eyes still opened wide, trapped in an eternal final moment. Blood cascaded down his pink flesh, many of his scales having been removed, and his tailfin had been torn to pieces, one ripped clean off. He felt sick at the sight, trying to at least picture any other dragon there in his friend's place, but there remained the image of a dead Night Fury, its carcass completely mutilated. And he could hear the Vikings cheers of glory to his name, this bloodshed being a cause for celebration to those _animals_.

No amount of glory, or respect, was worth the life of his best friend. Hiccup was no dragon killer, and if that was what it took to be respected, if that was what served as the source of compassion to these people, then let he be known as 'Hiccup the Useless.' He gazed at his father hardly, and dropped the weapon to the round, letting it fall to the floor with a hard thud.

This time there was no restraint, Stoick's arm came down and gave Hiccup a heavy smack to the face with his giant hand, launching the yelping boy towards the stairs with his head hitting the bottommost step. Hiccup felt a trickle of blood run down the back of his head and gazed fearfully up at his father, shocked that he would hit him. Stoick was breathing hard, the rage ready to burst out in full at last.

"Why do the gods spite me!? WHY DID I HAVE SUCH A USELESS, IDIOT CHILD!?"

Hiccup let the restraints break loose as well, letting the tears fall down like tiny waterfalls. Stoick was utterly disgusted at the sight, and turned to face the door, ready to just get away from his difficult child and assess the damage his stupid contraption had caused. Just as he was about to open the door, thoughâ€¦

"Whyâ€¦" Hiccup asked in tears. "Why did mom have to go awayâ€¦ why'd

she have to die?" He whispered so quietly with rage and pain no child should ever have carried within them.

"WHY COULDN'T IT HAVE BEEN YOU!?"

Stoick's eyes were wide open with devastation, the horrible question echoing throughout both the walls of the house and his mind. His own child had just wished for his death out of pain and anger, feelings he had obviously placed within him. He felt his heart shatter into pieces just as it had when Valka was taken to her doom that fateful night, and he could imagine her spirit glaring in shame down at him, screaming in rage just as Hiccup had for his callousness. He had sworn he would protect their child and here he had done the complete opposite, he had torn the remainder of their family apart. He turned around to face Hiccup, but the child was gone, small puddles of blood and tears all that remained of him.

Hiccup had already run outside, crying his eyes out rushing through the rain that had been falling on the island for most likely the whole duration of their fight. He rushed to the forge, to lock himself in his little workspace and never come out again. This time he didn't care about the hurt he might have inflicted, he was done with being charitable towards such ungrateful people. This time, he was the one who would get to cause hurt with his words, this time he could be the one who broke someone's heart, and in his father's case, he hoped it _burned_. He finally got to the forge and just locked the door behind him, then just huddling into the corner and bawling his eyes out. Hiccup had planned on staying there for the whole night, possibly for a few days, but fate would not have it.

At that moment, he heard a loud sound from behind the walls. A loud, shrieking roar.

* * *

><p>FYI, I don't know if the idea for the planter came from some subconscious memory. I feel like I just invented it right on the spot. Which is what I do for most of these conversations, so yeah, I'm willing to just roll with it.

Anyways for those that are getting sad, don't worry! Next chapter we finally start getting somewhere. As the title and summary suggest, I am not writing this just to tell a 'woe is Hiccup' story â€“ there'd be no HicTooth fluff if that were the case. And for those that might be hoping for a little Hiccstrid in this or the re-write, don't. You want to read some Hiccstrid, go somewhere else â€“ there are literally thousands of those on this site. And just as many that have Astrid as your main character, for all her fans out there.

Anyways, review, favorite, follow! Like I said, next chapter's where we wrap this up and get the ball rolling. And it will definitely be on time.

9. Chapter 9

**Okay, sorry for the wait â€“ I know I said I would put these up every Saturday and yet here I am putting this one up the day after. I might end up changing that policy to updating every second Saturday

or so, or at least until I get the chapter up. I'm starting to feel a bit burned out after forcing myself to update so frequently and I want this to be a quality product. I feel like my work is starting to suffer from that regard and the last thing I want is to deliver some half-baked read.**

Now, as for noticeable reviews.

NinjaRiderWriter: Thank you for the really kind words, yours has to be the lengthiest review I have ever seen. In fact I find myself reading it over and over. Seriously people, read this guy's review, particularly the first paragraph. If I haven't done a good job of defending my work, then he will â€“ I think he words it better than I do.

Madhuntr: Should I be flattered or offended by your comment? I'm glad you found this relatable and you love it, but please refrain from calling it stupid or anything of the like. If you're going to critique my work, I'd at least like a reason why. I'm not particularly upset; really, I'm a bit confused at where your going with that comment, but refrain from just insulting it like that in the future if you are to comment again.

Finally, from reading comments and PMs, let me remind people that this is NOT going to be a Hiccup and Astrid romance fic. They may have little moments in the future, but it's not going to be romantically implied, unless you want to interpret it that way because you're crazy about pairings. Hiccup will not be hooking up with Heather or any OCs either. I know the genre for this fic is meant to be Adventure and Fantasy, but as some of you might have noticed, I'm really including all genres in this, save for romance. I am not a romance writer and I don't plan to be. Again, there are thousands of HxA love fics on this site, and this will not be one of them.

Now then, a bit of forewarning that this chapter is gonna get pretty intense. This is because it marks one of the major plot points in the story. Enjoy if you can, because this is where the angst really cranks up.

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* * *

><p>Though the night sky was still overcast with an abundance of heavy clouds, small holes were broken in the bank, allowing small glimpses at the starry view behind. The possibility of a second shower upon the island was high, yet all the animals were safely tucked away in their holes and burrows. The rain had done wonders for the forest, nourishing the roots of the plants that had gone weeks without water. Thick aromas of wet pine and moss filled the air, carried on the soft breeze that wafted through the trees and shook small droplets from the leaves and branches. All the woodland was filled with a sense of calm, still slumbering away into the late hour.<p>

The cove was no different, all still in the aftermath of the storm, the stars' light reflected clearly upon the surface of the pond. Aside from the sound of a chirping cricket here and there, it was completely silent. This allowed for a peaceful night's sleep for the

little dragon hidden concealed in the darkness of a small cave imbedded in the rock. Toothless laid with his head atop his paws, curled in on himself, his body slowly rising and falling with his slow, easy breathing; the huddled black mass that was his body blended with the shadows inside the cave, making him completely imperceptible to any that might have looked in. Toothless had made out the cavern to be a safe hiding spot when he had first arrived, and as tonight had proved, a good protection against the elements. A wet dragon head was incapable of igniting the internal gases needed for fire breath were he to encounter any battle-hungry humans. Not that he saw any humans here besides Hiccup, but the little Night Fury decided not to take his chances.

Toothless continued to sleep away, letting the fresh smells of rain and nature blend together, until another aroma caught his attention. The dragon scrunched his nostrils in discomfort from the unpleasant mixture of the previous scent combined with this new one. Not that it was unpleasant, the young Night Fury had smelled this scent before; it was one that should have been familiar to all dragons, their affinity with the connecting element strong. It was a scent of wood smoke, something burning, and not just wood, but also metal and stone.

Something was on fire.

Snorting out to eject the scent from his nostrils, Toothless awoke shaking his head and wiping his nose with his paw. He stood and stretched his body out, the snapping of his bones unheard over the loud yawn from his open jaws. He stepped out into the open with his paws sloshing upon the damp, low-cut grass with every step, feeling the small beads of moss stick onto his scaly paws. With his head pointed to the sky he sniffed around for the source of the smoke, turning in all directions in his search. He opened his eyes once he had fixed onto the location, both sight and smell telling him that the smoke was coming from Berk.

In the direction of the human village there were large, thick pillars of smoke reaching up into the air and dwarfing the trees just above the cove and blocking out the stars. The distant sounds of roaring soon caught Toothless's ears, perking him up into a fully alert state. A mighty gust blew from behind him and he turned his attention up to catch a glimpse of a Monstrous Nightmare flying towards the human village. Soon the larger dragon's roars were intermingled with the furious war cries of the Vikings. It didn't take a Night Fury to know what was going onâ€¦ the dragons were attacking the village to gather food once again.

Hiccup was in danger, the gravity of that realization triggering a screech of fear from Toothless, his eyes now in panicked slits. The little Night Fury had always worried whenever Hiccup went back to his village, always feared that something bad would happen there. Hiccup would try as he might when Toothless whined and begged every day when the boy tried to leave to convince him it was safe but he could never be consoled; the Viking Hiccup called his sire had carried in his voice that day they met a coldness within it. With his instincts and greater intelligence, Toothless had a way of sensing that underlying intent or emotion in other creatures and could discern their true nature quickly after. The coldness he sensed in Hiccup's sire was one carried throughout the village, a savagery that he had seen Hiccup to be the target of every time the boy came with bruises and cuts

splayed out upon his little body. The other humans had been cruel to him, and the raiding dragons would be no different; they would not exercise restraint because he was a child. Stealth and discretion tossed aside, Toothless had to get to that village â€“ Hiccup would be killed if he didn't.

With a dash and a great leap, Toothless latched himself onto the cliff, scrambling with his claws and slashing apart the rock. The Night Fury stumbled and slipped multiple times, each second of delay passing blurring his ability to think clearly and remember he could simply fly his way out. He flapped his wings to accelerate his climb and soon his claws hooked onto the edge of the cove. Toothless pulled himself out at last and could now see the blazing orange glow breaking through the forest, coming from the village now burning from the dragon's attacks. Toothless let out a horrified roar that could only be interpreted as the boy's name, calling out in the hopes his boy could hear him. If anything happened to his Hiccup, the little dragon was not sure what he'd do, all he knew is that it would be a loss he wouldn't be able to take.

Bounding through the forest at top speed, Toothless set off, flapping his wings to push him forward even faster and even lift up into the air in short burst to avoid oncoming obstacles. He could only hope Hiccup was holding on somehow.

* * *

><p>Hiccup could still hear the roar ringing in his ears and still feel the trembling of the wooden boards in its wake. The cry seemed to come directly from the side exit of his workplace, and Hiccup had a strong feeling that whatever had made it was still there. Cautiously as he could, the boy shuffled his way over to the door, bracing himself for whatever he might find on the other side. He kept his tiny fist pressed hard upon his chest to brace himself, taking hard breaths to calm his racing pulse but to no avail. Biting his lip, he grabbed onto the handle of the door and flung it open.<p>

There, standing inches away from him, was a furious-looking Monstrous Nightmare, growling and snarling with its fangs bared right at him. Hiccup's eyes widened in somewhat-controlled panic as he gazed upon the creature's slit eyes, feeling the heat of the gases exhaled out building in its throat in preparation for its attack. The Nightmare reared its head back and let loose a heavy stream of fire right at him; Hiccup managed to slam the door just in time before even a lick of flame could touch him. The flames collided with the door, bursting through the slats with a loud boom while Hiccup pressed his body against it as hard as he could and recoiling back from the force. Even after the fire had subsided, he held himself back with his arms stretched against the door, shaking uncontrollably at his near-death experience.

A few more minutes had passed until the shaking had reduced to a controllable level and Hiccup could get back on his feet again. He picked himself up and rushed out of his workspace to the main workbench of the forge, ricocheting off of the table to head outside. He stood just outside the side entrance and gasped in terror.

Every corner of the sky was filled with dragons, circling over the homes looking for their next prey, be it human or animal. Hiccup

could see breeds of all kinds: Gronkles that hovered on their tiny, hummingbird-like wings, Nadders moving with grace and agility, Zipplebacks fighting between each of their pairs of heads for control, and Nightmares flapping their great wings practically itching for challenge. From above they let loose their fire blasts on each and every house in sight; currently there was not a one Hiccup could see that had evaded their fiery wrath. Some dragons had perched themselves upon the houses or landed on the ground and continued their assault, blasting buildings to pieces in a shower of flaming wood planks and splinters launching themselves off once bolas were thrown in their direction. They made their way towards the barns, the fields and the storehouses, locking on to the scent of fish and meat and promptly breaking through the roofs or doors to scoop up their prizes in their jaws and talons. A lucky few managed to escape and fly away or provide continued support; the others were knocked down either by bolas or from the massive boulders fired from the catapults lined on the perimeters of the island.

On the Vikings' side, they were charging forward in droves raising their weapons in the air, the intent to kill abundant in their voices and eyes. Anywhere they spotted a dragon, they closed in and started swinging wildly, bashing the winged reptiles' faces in with their maces and hammers or chopping off their heads with their swords and axes. They grounded dragons with their bolas and dogpiled atop of them to prevent any means of escape while one more came in to finish the job. All around, dragons' wings and tails were being sliced apart, limbs were being severed, even their horns and spikes were ripped out of their bodies. With each successful kill, the Vikings cheered in triumphant glory, but Hiccup could only look at the desecrated carcasses that they considered their rewards and feel completely sick to his stomach. Upon the watchtowers, several Vikings looked out to search for more dragons in the distance, alerting them to the troops down below. Everywhere the young boy looked, fire and stone, steel and claw clashed, and every confrontation ending in blood.

Hiccup's dead fix on the scenes of conflict were interrupted by a loud call of "Hiccup!" He turned around to see Gobber, glancing hardly at him while trying to multitask and fix a dented sword with his forge hammer attachment. Just out the window he could see numerous Vikings all lined up, antsy and fidgeting to get back into the action. Gobber already had a number of replacement weapons all lined up and ready to go on the table, but the picky, stubborn men and women insisted on only fighting with their ancestral weapons and heirlooms.

"What're you doin' here?" The smith asked. "Shouldn't you be up a' the Hall with the other women an' children?"

"Uhâ€¦" Hiccup was too drawn into the conflict to really respond. It was the first time he had ever really seen a dragon raid up close, or even at all. He was usually locked inside the house by his father, and there were times when the man had forgotten he was even in there. Stoick had probably thought it similar to the other times when Hiccup was sent to the Great Hall with the other women and children. Hiccup didn't really want to think about his father now, and he certainly didn't want to talk about the big fight he had with him to Gobber.

"Ah, nevur mind! Ya wanna be here, make yerself useful and get ta

sharpenin' some swords!" Gobber yelled, clearly rushed by the swarm of immediate customers. He tossed Hiccup a large sword, only for the young boy to topple over at the weight of the dulled blade.

Hiccup struggled to pick himself back up while still hefting the sword in both his hands. He had to let the tip fall to the ground while holding onto the doorway for support. "B-But these weapons are too heavy for me, and I still can't use the grinding wheel by myself yet!"

"So figure it out! Don' know if ya noticed but this ain't the time ta get cold feet!" Gobber yelled impatiently.

"C-Can't I justâ€¦ sweep up the shop like always?" Hiccup asked.

"I'm in the middle o' rush hour here! Clearin' out dust ain't gonna clear out these whinin' numbskulls!" The Vikings in line all cried out in protest at Gobber's insult while he gestured to them, but the crippled smith only grew more irritated. "Ah, quit yur gripin! A hundred years or a hundred minutes, an axe is an axe!"

"Uhâ€¦" Hiccup mumbled backing away. "Maybe I should justâ€¦ head over to the Great Hallâ€¦"

Gobber had been dumbstruck enough to drop what he was working on right there and just stare at the young boy. Hiccup felt highly uncomfortable being the center of attention in the midst of the growing chaos and kept his own eyes on the floor. "So lemme get this straight â€“ you plan on running thru hundreds of fire-breathin' dragons an' Vikings an run tha risk o' getting' carried off an' eaten ta get ta tha Great Hall?"

"Wellâ€¦ I'm a good runner." Hiccup said.

"Forget it! The second you step out there you'll be a sliced, char-broiled appetizer!" Gobber shouted. "An' as delighted as the dragons would be a tha', I highly doubt yur father'd want you acting so recklessly, so, soâ€¦ Hiccup-y!"

Hiccup grimaced; of course his father wouldn't want to act like himself and get ideas of his own. Unless he was acting like how his father wanted him to, Hiccup was doing something wrong. He might have taken offense at how his natural behavior was synonymous with idiocy, but he was too angry at his father to care. He hardly noticed when a dagger had smacked him in the forehead, but it did snap him into attention enough to catch the falling blade as he held it in his hand.

"If ya can't handle the swords, then take care of the daggers; I'm sure even you can't screw tha' up." Gobber said returning to work. "Course, yuv proven people wrong before."

"But, I can't-" Hiccup started.

"Look, one day yur gonna be out there fightin' dragons along wit' the others out there, an' by then yu won' have time ta wonder if yur ready or not! You wanna be called 'Hiccup the Useless' for the rest of your life!?" He angrily shouted at Hiccup, who fell back in shock at his mentor's rare tone of aggravation.

"Either help me or move aside," was all he said.

In the past, such tones would force Hiccup into a submissive state of obedience so as to avoid further wrath from the others. Force was really the only thing Vikings could use that would spur him into attention, and Hiccup wondered if that might have been the driving force behind their cruelty. The more he tightened his grip on the blade in thought about it, the more he realized that couldn't be the case: when people like Snotlout or his uncle spoke to him using such harsh words and actions, too harsh to be considered strict in the name of kindness, it was for their own sick amusement. Next to this sadistic arrogance they all shared, the creatures they considered unholy demons couldn't have been nearly as horrible. Toothless was supposedly the most vicious dragon of them all and he was Hiccup's best friend, really his only friend. The small weapon he stared down at, held in his hand was no different from the larger-scale models shoved into his hands by Gobber and his father, similarly created for the purpose of robbing life from dragons like him. And even if he had used the weapon for its designed intent and successfully killed a dragon, the chance that others would accept him was still very slim. It was pointless, downright stupid, to sacrifice an already-existing friendship for only the slightest possibility of acknowledgement from others that never liked him to begin with. This life was not the kind he wanted â€“ he would earn respect and find happiness in this tribe some other way.

Hiccup looked up and gave a hard, upset glare to the smith, who now had returned to work and paid no mind to the problematic apprentice. The boy's hands had gripped the blade so hard it had now cut into his skin, sending trickles of blood down onto the ground.

"Fineâ€¦" He said. Gobber had finally looked up by now and noticed that Hiccup had already vanished, ran out the doorway. He wanted to run out and chase after the boy and give him a proper scolding but he had plenty of other worries on his plate at the moment. He exasperatedly shook his head and returned to his work.

"Let's see if yur luck holds out, kidâ€¦" He mumbled.

* * *

><p>Hiccup was now bolting through the village, weaving past multiple Vikings by moving beside them or sliding under their legs. It was easy enough to move past their enlarged forms, while it was pure luck that he could evade the attacking dragons. He had to cover his head to avoid the rains of fiery wood and stray stones, and narrowly managed to recoil back when oversized chunks were headed his way. The constant screams of aggravation asking him what he was doing out or telling him to 'get inside' or just 'get lost' were mostly ignored while the boy continued to run for his life. Hiccup was moving at his top speed now, zipping past and even in-between most of the houses to reach the Great Hall.<p>

This was the truth of his life, this was probably how it was going to be for the remainder of his days on Midgard. Just running past his fellow tribesmen just trying not to get in the way, just narrowly avoiding losing his life while others fought for the right to keep theirs. He did believe in his inventions and wanted others to see their value, but there had always been times when he wished he could

have the chance to fight like they did. Not as a dragon slayer, but as a hero â€“ someone who fought for what was right and protected those that were being wrongfully punished and could not protect themselves. He would raise his sword in defense of the helpless and fight for what was right. Hiccup couldn't help but notice the desperate way the dragons fought, looking at the sense of fear in each of their eyes. Perhaps it was the dragons that needed that protection; maybe he could find some way to help humans see that dragons weren't so bad, that they could be friends like Toothless. Maybe he could be a hero to themâ€¦

His thoughts and running were interrupted when he felt a hard tug on the back of his shirt. For a moment he expected to see his father and readied himself for yet another bout of screams to the face. Cracking one eye open, he saw it was not his father, but his uncle Spitelout, looking at him with an emotionless glare. Hiccup's eyes widened in nervous surprise â€“ honestly, this felt a lot worse than his father.

"What are you doin' out here, boy?" His uncle asked rather coldly, even for him.

Hiccup gulped his fear down rather audibly; looking at his uncle now, he got that sense of distrust and foreboding more so than any of the other Vikings on the island. That ominous feeling was at its peak right now with the man that arguably was a member of his own family. "â€¦I-I wasâ€¦ I was going to the Great Hall."

"Right now? You're telling me you didn't hear the signal horn blow for the dragons?" He scoffed. "Unbelievable, it seems yur ears are as useless as the rest of you."

Hiccup wanted to protest and say he was not useless and he was sick of people calling him as such, but the words only died on his tongue. Really, he wasn't even sure how he had mustered up the courage to talk back to Astrid and his father, even when they had called him selfish in total disregard to his efforts. Those moments seemed so completely out of character for him, the old him merely shrugging the comments off as best as he could and stuffing away the hurt by locking it in a chest in his heart. Right now, that seemed to be the best course of action.

"P-pleaseâ€¦ just l-let me go and I-I-I'll head off to the Great Hallâ€¦ I-I won't get in your way." He stuttered.

"Oh, I assure you, you won't... you won't be getting' in anyone's way anymore." Spitelout spat.

"Enough beatin' around the bush, Spitelout, let's jest get this over with!" A voice cried out from behind them.

Spitelout and Hiccup turned and noticed several other Vikings walk up toward them, all with glares as cold as the one on his uncle's face. Hiccup recognized them all as the fathers of the other children: Arnbjorn Hofferson, father of Astrid, with a blond mustache and thin beard alongside the edges of his face, Tuffnut and Ruffnut's father with braided dirty-blond hair like theirs, and even Fishlegs' father, rather portly like his son was turning out to be. For some reason they had all just decided to take a break from the onslaught of violence still raging around them, and by all appearances it looked

as if they weren't even noticing it.

"I assure ye, Arnbjorn, no one wants to be done with this more than I, but it seems only appropriate that we leave myâ€¦ _nephew_â€¦ with a few parting words." On the word 'nephew' he spat out with more disgust than if he had ingested a full tankard of yak spit and dragon dung mixed together. The vile word felt like acid on his tongue, only worsened by the fact in that such a weak child could actually be his kin, by marriage or blood.

"Well, get to it; hard to believe as it is, someone might have a problem with what we're up to." The father of the twins cried out, an ironic chuckle in his tone.

Hiccup stayed silent while all the adults laughed out loud and just continued to walk off, away from the main action and towards a more isolated part of the village. The boy looked back and saw most of the others still engaged in combat, latching on to the tails of the dragons and tossing them away or whacking the daylights out of them. Their battle-cries still echoed out even as their visages faded behind the heated glow of the fires, and Hiccup turned his attention to the path ahead. The group of Viking fathers all stopped in front of a shed that had a few extra weapons stored inside but had otherwise remained empty. The shed appeared to be old and falling apart, already with a few loose and fallen-out boards and holes in the roof from years of decay. He remembered his father had ordered the shed cleared out when he realized it was a disadvantageous place to hold their armaments since it was an easy target for the dragons to strike. With no weapons they would not only be defenseless against the dragons, but also against any other armies that might try to attack them and conquer Berk.

Spitelout suddenly released Hiccup from his grasp, only to seize him up again by grabbing his tiny wrist and raising up the boy to dangle in front of his face. "Tell me boy, why do you think you're here?"

Hiccup could by all means provide no answer to that question, regardless of whether or not it came completely out of nowhere as it did. People were risking life and limb and here his uncle was asking him insightful questions like this? Instead of helping his ailing fellow tribesman who by now had suffered from more than a few burns and injuries? He didn't even think Vikings could get insightful for that matter, the biggest questions they ever asked was regarding what to punch next or how long until they cleared out the dragons. If his uncle was wondering why was he here with them wondering for the life of him what was going on and not at the Great Hall just praying for it all to be overâ€¦ well, he just didn't know.

"I asked you a question, boyâ€¦" Spitelout muttered in a dangerously low voice. "Now speak. Why do you think yur here?"

"I-I don't knowâ€¦" Hiccup whispered, at this moment quite frightened.

Spitelout only smirked coldly. "Wellâ€¦ to be perfectly honest, neither do we." Hiccup cocked an eyebrow in confusion, puzzled to high Asgard by his uncle's words. "You don't seem to have any kind of redeeming qualities, none of the bravery and fortitude that those like my boy and I have. I mean look at you â€“ you're weak, you're

cowardly, you're whiny, foolish, an outright nuisance. Odin knows what we did to deserve such punishment."

Spitelout had stated it all in a manner-of fact tone that showed how he regarded all this as a manner of truth. Hiccup could put aside the insults but to hear that he considered the hateful and brutal mockery he and Snotlout applied a sign of bravery; Hiccup had no words for how outrageous it was. Just what was bravery to these people, or virtue and honor?

"And ta think yur father had such high hopes when you were bornâ€¦" Hiccup gasped at these words, alerted to the possibility that Spitelout might have heard the argument between them hours earlier.

"Obviously his faith was misplaced!" Arnbjorn spat, and all the other men guffawed arrogantly.

"Or simply mistaken." Spitelout continued in his icy cold tone that could make the most devastating of winter frosts on Berk seem like a tropical vacation on a hot summer's day. "You came before your ordained time, frail and on the verge of death, yet he dared to believe you would survive. How foolish he was, to see worth in something that was worthless, value in something he should have just tossed into the ocean to give the sharks a scrap ta chew upon!"

With shuddered breaths and eyes dangerously close to crying from his uncle's words, Hiccup muttered out. "Why? W-Why are you saying all thisâ€¦?"

"Bah," Arnbjorn spat. "Shames himself and us further with every word. My Astrid better have been spared from whatever disease this fishbone might be carrying. Couldn't get her away from him any sooner!"

"If you're going ta weep, go ahead; no one here thinks less of you than they already do!" The men cackled out loud again, obviously enjoying the little runt squirm in sadness and fear, feeding off of it to fuel their bigotry even further. Hiccup tried to look away, not giving these beasts the satisfaction of seeing him weep, just as he had denied Snotlout and the twins the same in weeks past. His efforts were in vain when Spitelout grabbed his chin and jerked the boy's head to face him, taking a good look at his reddened eyes about ready to tip over like a goblet with just as good an amount of tears.

"Just look at you, boy, just as pathetic 'n gutless as yur mother was." Spitelout sneered while the boy's eyes widened in angered shock. "A curse that spineless witch placed upon us, and my brother would dare to sully the glory of Berk and its people by making you its chief?"

"Let dragons tear out my limbs 'n devour my guts 'fore the wretched day comes when I pledge loyalty ta this weakling!" The Thorston Viking cried.

"A disgrace to Berk and all Vikings, no sane man would view him as a leader!" Cried the Ingerman.

"Idiot brat and his ludicrous ideas would bring about our doom long before the beasts even get the chance. That woman o' Stoick's plagues

us even in death!" Arnbjorn shouted.

"Tell us now, All-Father, have we not been faithful to you!?" Spitelout shouted to the heavens, his glimses to the kingdom of Valhalla blocked by the smoke rising from the burning houses. He raised Hiccup up to the sky, squeezing hardly upon his wrist enough to crush the thin bone barely protected inside. "We have always followed in your example and taken the path of righteousness, we slay the foul demons that stain the realm of Midgard and carried ourselves with strength and honor! How is it that we have displeased you to such a degree that you would allow this pitiful excuse for a youth to be born!?" With no answer, Spitelout scoffed and shook his head, bringing Hiccup back down and opening the door to the shed. The door creaked on its hinges, worn out and rusted, ready to break apart but stubbornly hanging on just as the Vikings who constructed it would. "Never mind, the time has now come. I, Spitelout Jorgenson, will now correct the mistakes of both the Gods and my brother."

With a hearty cheer from the others, Hiccup broke out of his horrified, emotionally wounded trance and turned back to his uncle. "W-What are you doing?"

Spitelout sneered his darkest, most evil-looking sneer, and it sent chills down Hiccup's spine and formed goose bumps on every inch of his skin. In the boy's eyes, his uncle disappeared only to be replaced with the fiery giant he saw in his dreams, the one chanting for destruction. Hiccup was staring into the eyes of the devil that had taken residence in his uncle's soul, seeing the emptiness and darkness of the apparition with flames that slowly lost their light and their color, and soon turned to a ghoulish black.

"What should have been doneâ€¦ SEVEN YEARS AGO!"

With all his might, Spitelout threw Hiccup into the old shed, reeling his arm back and tossing the boy straight inside as if he was a bola meant to ensnare a dragon. Hiccup crashed onto the floor and slammed into the wall, feeling his chest and arms throb with soreness from the impact. Just recovering he heard the door slam and lock behind him, and realized he was now trapped inside. He rushed to the door as quickly as he could and banged on it repeatedly, screaming out for his uncle to release him while placing every ounce of his might into forcing the door open. As expected, his pitiful strength was not enough to even budge the failing door, but that did not stop him from trying.

Spitelout, meanwhile, roared out into the night sky and drew his sword, drawing the attention of any roaming dragons. He managed to snag the attention of a roaming Deadly Nadder, the creature balefully glaring down on him with slits full of hatred. The dragon zoomed down and screeched at him, preparing its fire and unleashing it in a focused stream. Spitelout and the others jumped out of the way and let the fire collide with the shed, setting it alight in flames. The fire tore away at the wood, turning it black and rendering it to ash in mere seconds. The four Vikings chuckled looking at the fire that would soon end the life of the useless boy, and ran back to join the others in combat, their dark deed having been accomplished.

Hiccup had jumped back at the blast of fire that hit the wood and backed away as quickly as he could to get away from the approaching fire. A useless attempt as the fire soon spread out everywhere and

covered every inch of the house until the entire shed was alight with flames. He looked around for any means of escape but only found a gathering of blazes in every direction, from the floor and the walls, cornering him and approaching with the ferocity of a wolf pack. Hiccup was beginning to sweat from the intense heat, the beads of moisture running down his face though his skin quickly dried afterward; sweltering, burning like the heat of the forge multiplied a hundred times, his skin received small burns that quickly deepened, dying his pale skin a harmful reddish black. Hiccup could compare the burns to the touch of molten steel, a searing wound quickly intensifying in pain. The light of the fire stung in his eyes, and he squinted so as to avoid the harmful light, though it still seemed through, with embers flaking upon his eyeballs. The black smoke rising from within the house was already reaching up into his throat and he coughed violently, only for more smoke to enter. The smoke covered his view but only caused further harm to his eyes, irritating the liquid inside.

"Help," He croaked. "Somebody, help!" Over and over he repeated.

No one could hear him over the roar of the flames, or the crashing of the support beams from above. He tried to call out for help again regardless, but the smoke only entered his lungs once more and he coughed out, the air quickly evaporating. If the heat of the flames didn't cremate his little body, no doubt the smoke would choke him to death. He moved back to a corner of the building to avoid any more falling debris and peeked out through a hole in the wall, hoping to see maybe someone having noticed and try to help him.

He managed to see someone â€“ the other children, looking out from the door of the Great Hall. Astrid was lookingâ€¦ surprised, not shocked. Snotlout and the others were smiling and laughing, no doubt his plight was amusing to them, while Fishlegs was deliberately trying with all his might to turn away. Hiccup stared at them for a few good seconds until screaming out to them; they had to see him, their expressions told as such. To his horrified shock, the children all turned away, Astrid not even needing any encouragement from the nonchalant Snotlout. They all just paid it no mind and returned to the Great Hall to wait out the attack, just preferring to ignore a desperate plea for help as if it had never been needed.

Even after they were gone, Hiccup still looked at the doors after them, only turning away a few long moments after the doors had been shut. He turned back and slid upon the burning wooden wall, horrified by what had just happened. They had clearly seen him in danger and they just left him to die, Snotlout and the twins had even laughed at him. Spitelout called such behavior bravery and righteousness, and still would because someone like him was not even worth saving. He was going to die, and his end would fill his 'people' with nothing but happiness. They would cheer in celebration and throw parties with games, drink and merriment, no emotion felt over his departure. No tenderness to give, contests would be held over who could throw an axe dead center into his face or who could come up with the greatest insult. He had given everything he had to this village, seeking its betterment; sure he also wanted acceptance, but wasn't that only fair? For his efforts to be repaid in thisâ€¦

The heat was now getting to him, Hiccup could feel a severe headache seeping into his brain and gripping at it like a vice. The room was spinning, dizziness quickly overtaking him, delirium starting to pass

into his psyche. The sharp entrails of flame began to blur, the crackling of burning wood fading out, being replaced with whispers of the past. The Berkians' voices, repeating over and over, while the fading flames took their forms, appearing as glowing specters before him:

"'_Sorry' doesn't make up for the fact that you made a mess of everything!"_

"_You can't do anything right, Hiccup the Useless!"_

"_You really are nothing but trouble!"_

"_You're a disgrace ta Berk, to all Vikings!" _

"_What I expect is a worthwhile sonâ€¦"_

"_You're such a pestâ€¦"_

"â€¦_Even you can't screw tha' up!"_

"â€¦_Acting like a spoiled brat!"_

"_No one should havetae waste time on a useless weakling like you!"_

"_WHY DID I HAVE SUCH A USELESS, IDIOT CHILD!?"_

Stop, he just wanted it to stop, he thought as he curled up and held his head down bracing his head with clenched hands. At this point he was more than willing to let death take him; no one was coming to save him, no one cared for him. In his final shuddering breaths of despair, growing heavier and slower with every second, he failed to notice a screeching sound building up from behind the wall, or the flash of cobalt and violet that immediately came afterward.

A hole was blasted into the wall, with whitened smoke coming out of the singed sides, and in came the frantic form of Toothless. The dragon darted around in circles, desperately seeking his frightened boy. He heard Hiccup's call not with his ears, but could feel it in his soul, sensing the danger Hiccup was in and rushed to his rescue. He looked around and around, barely catching his boy's form huddled in the corner slipping into unconsciousness with death soon to follow. The Night Fury's horrified green eyes widened and he called out to grab his boy's attention. Hiccup's head snapped up at the familiar bark, and he managed to spot the dragon's black body even through the thick smoke with his injured eyes.

"T-Toothlessâ€¦" He rasped, his voice ragged by the smoke. He thought he was hallucinating for a moment, but the dragon's attempts to claw away at the debris that had fallen right in front of him had convinced him otherwise. With shaky feet he stood up to try and reach him.

"Toothl-"

Before he could mutter out any more, a piece of the roof fell down and collided right with his left eye. He screamed in pain, clutching his eye with both his hands, the agony of the fresh burn unbearable to the child. He stumbled and crouched down, crying freely, sobbing

and shrieking uncontrollably while the burn throbbed; Toothless, seeing his boy's pain, went completely ballistic. He blasted through the wood with splinters flying everywhere, and he rushed right over to Hiccup, crooning and whimpering for the injured child. He tried to lick the wound, but Hiccup only kept it tightly covered to stave off the tormenting injury, so the dragon just settled for curling close to the boy.

But more falling debris alerted the dragon to the still-present danger they both faced; Hiccup would surely die if they remained here a second longer. He nudged Hiccup back to his senses and scooped him up in his paws, grasping onto the boy tightly and pressing his body to his chest. He spread his wings and took flight through the open hole, taking off into the open sky and quickly fleeing the burning island. Toothless took one last look back at the horrible island where his boy endured constant pain and snarled in hatred at it. Never again would they hurt his boy, never would he suffer at their hands, because never again would they return to this wretched place.

The two flew for a short distance before approaching a small nearby island, Toothless gently landing and blowing away a few stray leaves. For the most part it seemed uninhabited, no signs of human settlements or even human presence anywhere. As far as the dragon could see it was nothing but tall pine trees surrounding them, save for a clearing with a small lake filled with pure, sparkling water. There was even a little cave right by the lake to offer shelter for the two of them. It was just like the cove, except without the large walls of stone to make it seem like a prison. It was just as peaceful as well, all was silent just as it had been moments before Toothless discovered the fire. Here they would be safe to spend their days together, undisturbed and untouchable by the outside world.

He let the small boy loose from his grasp and looked down to him in sorrow, whimpering and nudging him for comfort. For a while Hiccup continued to press himself against Toothless, kneeled down on the ground covering his face in the dragon's scaly belly. Hiccup finally looked up at his dragon and let go of his eye, now scarred with a red and black burn just like the rest of his body. His eye was squinted in pain, more than likely never to open fully again and the brow was mostly gone, a few scratches filling the empty spots along it. Both eyes were the same in how they soon filled up with rivers of tears, the dams finally breaking loose.

He sobbed silently a few times, but then went all out and began to cry without pause, the fear and sorrow all catching up with him at last. He had come so close to death, his own people, a member of his family had tried to take his life. Hiccup had never been so terrified, he felt as though his heart had stopped; it had been so close, it had nearly taken him. He felt completely paralyzed against it, unable to move or even think, just waiting for the flames to burn him to ashes. He could still feel himself shiver and with each second longer he sobbed he gasped in the air that had been robbed from his body, trying desperately to dismiss it as a horrible nightmare.

Hiccup hugged the Night Fury tightly, just wanting the fear and the pain to go away, letting it all out in his overflowing tears. Toothless returned the sad embrace with both his paws and his wings, hiding Hiccup in a black cocoon and nuzzling him tenderly. Whatever

the dragon could do to erase the sadness his boy felt, he would do it.

* * *

><p>Stoick the Vast was just finishing off a Monstrous Nightmare, punching it over and over into submission, long forgoing the usage of his hammer. His mighty fist crashed with the dragon's jawline again and again, even knocking out a few teeth in the process. The dragon tried to fight back with its fire breath, but it had run out of shots, no longer possessing enough gas to fuel the flames. It lashed its tail out, but Stoick caught it in his hands and swung it back around, lifting the dragon in the air and sending it hurling away. The dragon, no longer willing to take such abuse, backed away and flapped its wings to take off into the air.<p>

Soon all the dragons began their retreat, some managing to take catches of sheep. Yaks, and fish, others simply escaping with their lives. Those that weren't so lucky, still remaining trapped under bolas, were cornered by groups of Vikings, and ultimately killed and gutted or taken over to the cells in the arena, where they would be locked up to never again see the light of day. The damage had been done, every building on the island had been set alight in flames, soon set to collapse; the Vikings knew the repairs that would come after would take a good few weeks' worth of work. To say nothing of the numerous fishing trips that would have to be undertaken in order to replace the stores they had lost, and no one was looking forward to that. But right now was a moment of celebration for the valiant defense of their home â€“ with honor and courage did they drive off the dragons once more. They raised their axes in hearty cheers, crying out amongst the roaring flames.

Stoick stood at the front of his men, still with a hardened look on his face. "Well done men! But remember we have only won the battle. The devils'll be back again, they always are."

Some people could accuse Stoick of being a pessimist, but he was simply looking on the side of reality, not letting glory in battle delude him. He knew the dragons would return in greater numbers and pick them off one by one; it was a never ending struggle for supremacy. As much as he wanted his men to enjoy the honor they had won by killing the dragons, one victory in battle didn't mean much in the face of a war. The chieftain hefted his axe solemnly after having effectively killed the mood. "Now then, are we all present an' accounted for."

"Eh, looks like it." Gobber said hobbling out from the crowd. "Men here'll be damned if they let a dragon do them in." The men chuckled and laughed, even Stoick let out a simple chuckle.

"An' what of the women an' children over at the Great Hall?" He asked.

"All present an' accounted for." Called out another Viking from the crowd. Stoick quickly noticed how he turned away afterwards and turned to face him accordingly.

"Butâ€¦?" Stoick asked, but the man remained silent.

"Stoick, Stoick!" Cried out a voice from the crowd. From between the

Vikings charged in Spitelout, a look of fear and panic on his face that was clearly faked. He heavily panted and his eyes were wide and bulbous, only adding to his performance. Luckily for him, no one seemed to be any wiser to his charade, not even his brother.

"What is it, Spitelout?" Stoick asked.

"Brother, it-it's Hiccup!" He cried, instantly alerting Stoick to full attention. "He wasn't in the Great Hall, we can't find him anywhere!"

Stoick gasped in terror and raced off towards the Great Hall, searching fervently for his son in the crowds of children, women, and elders that poured out. The women asked him what his troubles were, but he only paid attention to the young ones that were coming out. As hard as he looked, Hiccup was not among them, even the group of Astrid, Snotlout, Fishlegs, and the Thorston twins. Hiccup should have known to get into the Great Hall at the first sign of an attack, the apparentness that he hadn't was able to revitalize some anger within him. After how their argument ended he wasn't in the mood to deal with any Hiccup-related problems, but the boy was still his son nonetheless.

"Hiccup!" He called out, growing steadily terrified. "Hiccup, where are you?"

"I saw him!" A voice called out, and Stoick turned to its source. There was the young Snotlout Jorgenson, his nephew, his friends already having reunited with their parents. The look of fear on his face seemed to be inherited from his father, and just as false. "He ran into that shed over there to try and hide from the dragons!"

Snotlout pointed over to the shed, and Stoick's breath seized to find it had mostly been burned away to nothing. He quickly rushed over to the shed and reached out to bang on the door in the hopes that Hiccup might be able to hear him. But before he could even raise his hand, the last bit of support on the shed had broken apart, and the building collapsed in on itself. A flash of flames reached out as the wood crashed down, and the fire continued to burn at the remains until nothing was left. Stoick's distraught eyes were fixated on the ruins of the shed keeping his eyes on it until the last flicker died out. By then the others had caught up to him, informed of the situation by Snotlout, watching the flames died with him. No one in the ranks that had gathered dared to speak out in the face of the horrid reality, no one could really find any words to say.

"Hiccupâ€¦" Stoick hoarsely whispered. He heavily dropped to his knees at the sight, just staring with dead eyes at the house his son died in.

Gobber finally hobbled up, placing a gentle hand on Stoick's shoulder. "It's not your fault Stoick. The lad only tried ta get to safety." He turned away guiltily. "I shoulda kept him in the forge where he was, but Iâ€¦ ah thought fur sure he'd make it."

Stoick said nothing, he remained frozen in place, a broken man by the loss. Once again the dragons had robbed him of a loved one, first his wife, and now his son. How much more would they take until they were

satisfied? Stoick would now never get to see Hiccup grow into a man, into a proper chief and dragon slayer, he would never get to fight alongside him and attain glory together as father and son. He would never see his wife's reflection in his son again, in those green eyes and locks of auburn hair that so greatly resembled Valka's. His last connection to her was gone, and he had only helped to push it away.

"Such a great tragedyâ€¦" Spitelout muttered. "The boy had only begun to live, had yet to earn his place in Valhalla. Nowâ€¦ he shall never know peaceâ€¦" Hiccup had not died a warrior, so he would be denied access to Valhalla where only courageous warriors could feast with Odin, Thor and the rest. He had now been cast into the depths of Helheim and be forced to serve in Loki's armies, only knowing eternal torment until the day of Ragnarok. Stoick could not bear the thought that he and his child would come to stand on opposing sides at the battle of world's end. He bent down in shame with his fur cape draped over his back, the others all looking at their chief with pity.

"I am so sorry, brotherâ€¦" Spitelout said.

But Stoick could hear nothing, the world turned to black around him save for the wreck that was now the grave of his son. "Hiccupâ€¦"

* * *

><p>So there you have it, Hiccup was almost killed. Good news is, he's not on Berk anymore.

Alright, now let me clarify what's going to happen. I have decided to split this story into arcs, like 'To Tame a Land.' This is the first arc that explains Hiccup's origins, and from here on out the next chapters are going to be for the intent of character development. More good news is this is now where some of the more interesting stuff begins to happen, including the action.

Now then, with this chapter done, I am going to take a little break â€“ I am on Winter vacation after all. As stated before I am probably going to update either on every second Saturday now or whenever I get the chapter finished. In the meantime I look forward to your 'I really hate Spitelout and wish he would die' comments in the reviews.

As always, review, favorite, follow!

10. Chapter 10

Hello, there people! Thanks to all your patience and a special thanks to those who favorite, followed, and commented during the long period of silence. I am happy to post up my first chapter of 2015!

**I read some of your posts in the review section â€“ I gotta say, you guys are dark. But as much as you want to see Spitelout get what's coming to him, Berk is gonna be out of the picture for a while. For now, we'll be focusing on Hiccup's adventures as he deals with the aftereffects of his traumatic experience. We'll be going through a few timeskips, but nothing too big â€“ I'm not going to automatically fast-forward to the good stuff. There are several key

steps we need to take along the way â€“ every chapter going onwards for the rest of this first 'arc', I like to call it, will have significance to who Hiccup is going to be for the remainder of the story.**

On that note, I'm probably not going to be able to post as often. I've got classes starting up soon â€“ winter break is over, boohoo. But I'll try to devote some time to working on this and my other story and get those chapters up as soon as I can. With that being said, enjoy!

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* * *

><p>Hiccup was awoken to the start of another new day in his life of self-imposed exile by the gentle stirrings of tweeting birds and droplets of water coming from the ceiling of their cavern home. He blinked his weary right eye open and rubbed it clear of any residual traces of sleepiness. Heavy bags had formed under them from many nights of restless slumber, bolting awake mere minutes after closing his eyes and lying there for the night's duration, even when nestled close to his companion Toothless. Said dragon was nestled on the floor right next to him, still sleeping with his wings and legs sprawled out without his thin frame to grip upon. Hiccup took the greatest caution not to disturb the friend who had been so good to him in his time of need and tiptoed quietly away towards the entrance of the cave.<p>

Stopping at the opening, he shielded his one free eye with the shadow of his arm to allow himself to adjust to the outside light. Once he'd managed to blink away his discomfort, he surveyed the natural scene before him: the lake shimmered with the first rays of dawn, light rippling across the water's surface to reveal the small fish that swam beneath it. The long stalks of grass and the pine needles on the tress swayed from the morning breeze, carrying the fresh ocean and forest air that grazed his face. As always when he inhaled it into his tiny lungs, though, it did nothing to refresh his spirits as the boy sagged and sighed once more.

Two years had passed since they first arrived on this little islet, two years had they been living together â€“ just him and his dragon. Every day came and passed just as the one before and the boy was sure the next would in just the same fashion, spanning out together into a large blur of time apart from the place he once called home. His appearance had changed greatly in that time, having retained the scars of his torment to the point where he became a living symbol of it, a shadow of his former self. His clothes were torn and ragged, stained with dirt and with frayed ends of dangling thread, while the fur on the tunic and boots had either been hardened and soiled or lost leaving bare spots of the underlying textiles revealed. As thin as he was before, now he was nearly skeletal, with his ribs exposed â€“ even the wild game that Toothless hunted for him and the wild berries he picked in the forest could not satiate him well enough due to his lack of an appetite.

His most distinguishing features were the burns he now sported all over his body, leaving blistering red spots all over his forearms and legs. Particularly bad burns were located around his wrists in splotches that varied in size, nearly engulfing the entirety of them

due to his thinness. He could feel the lack of blood managing to reach his limbs, his hands always feeling cold; when exposed to any foreign element, they would sting so badly he would barely be able to clench his fingers.

The most noteworthy scar he now carried was the one placed upon his left eye, now a darker shade of red than the others to indicate the severity of it. The skin around it was now tender and leathery, and the phantom pains it caused were enough to make the child scream some nights, clutching it while enduring the full recollected fury of the inferno that first left the wretched scar before it returned to a state of numbness. He found in the first few months that the vision the injured eye granted was limited, at times either blurred or doubled, with constant migraines caused in addition. Though the discomfort had lessened in time, no amount of licks from Toothless or fresh water could soothe the pain, and witnessing its reflection every time he went to the lake had just become too painful after a long enough time. Ultimately, he resorted to tearing off one of the sleeves of his tunic and ripping it in half, using the strips as makeshift bandages to conceal his ruined face.

Hiccup blinked a few more times to keep himself awake, though tiredness gripped him like the hand of his father on his collar. In the lucky few nights he was able to get more than a few hours' rest, Hiccup would be plagued by nightmares of the incident where he waited for his death in that burning shack and heard the mocking voices of his peers as his final countdown. It was this traumatic experience that left him with his greatest dilemma, the source of all his suffering, both physical and mental.

Hiccup had developed a terrible fear of fire, with his sight often bearing the glare of the campfires Toothless made for him to keep him warm. Each and every time Toothless even let out a spark of flame, Hiccup would panic and shriek uncontrollably while scampering away to the far end of the cavern wall, clawing with his fingers upon the ground when he collapsed and continued on all fours. He would break into a cold sweat and breathe heavily while trying to push back farther in to get as far as possible from the fire that kept his gaze locked upon it in a burning steel trap. Toothless would always have to wrap around him with his entire body and hold him as close as possible just to calm the frightened child down, purring and crooning and giving him small licks â€“ whatever gesture of comfort he could give. They would remain that way long after the fire died out and Hiccup would still be trying to pull himself together until he could finally close his eyes; it was the way they always ended up retiring for the evening.

The dragon in question had finally stirred himself after a large yawn and a stretch of his legs, shaking his head and seeing Hiccup right at the entrance. Apart from growing larger to where he was now about a head-and-a-half taller than his boy, his appearance had mostly remained the same. His ears dropped and his tail dragged as he walked up to the boy's side, giving him a soft nuzzle and a warble of greeting. Hiccup only glanced once and absentmindedly scratched his forehead while still looking outward at their island home.

"Morning, Toothless," he rasped in an exhausted, saddened voice.

Toothless gazed at him with large black orbs filled with worry â€“ as

always nothing had changed regarding his boy's condition. The years spent in agony over his condition had taken a deep toll on his spirits. Hiccup never smiled anymore, never laughed, showed little to no trace of the curious, awestruck child he had been on the day they met. He did retain his kind spirit and talked to him a lot, but other than that it was like he was barely alive.

Hiccup started to make his way slowly down the hill towards the lake, moving slowly and rather dizzily along the slope walkway. Unable to even move in a straight line, he had to hold onto Toothless, who galloped over to walk alongside him, for support. His breaths were shallow and his vision blurred once more, while at the same time feeling sick to his stomach from the stress. Though he eventually made it to the lake, with Toothless settling him down gently.

He dipped his injured arms and hands into the water, yelping with the return of the sting as the burns inflamed. It was a common practice of his to use water to try and help the burns, though the temperature was far too cold in those first few moments. The dull pain lingered moments after the initial dip, but a soothing feeling had started to work its way in as well; Hiccup exhaled out in slight relief with his breathing slowed and calmed.

He took a few moments to wash his face after settling down and rose himself steadily onto his feet. Toothless offered a supportive crutch of himself once more as they headed towards the small stream that fed into the lake to have a small drink of fresh water. The cold fluid stung at his hands once again, each drop feeling like icy needles and made even worse with the addition of the wind. But Hiccup managed to bear it while he took sips from the water gathered in his palms to nourish his parched throat.

Toothless only warbled sadly when Hiccup turned to him with a face that desperately tried to brighten, only to fail. "Come on, Toothless. Let's go get some breakfastâ€¦"

The Night Fury bowed down and let Hiccup climb onto his back to keep him from tiring himself out while they headed for the forest. If there was one noticeable change in Toothless over the course of their time together, it was that he had become extremely overprotective of his boy. Toothless was hell-bent on keeping the damaged child safe from any harm, actual, potential, or even just imaginary. He wanted to make sure Hiccup was in his sight every moment of the day, and would not let him leave the cave unsupervised even for a single second. He growled and snapped at every living creature that moved towards Hiccup, from the tiniest bird or squirrel to even the wild dragons that flew by from time to time. Most of the animals by now did not dare to approach him knowing the dangerous young dragon was close by, but those that did usually never got any further than five feet before a plasma blast warned them that that was as far as they went. It was as if the dragon had suddenly made it his life's mission to protect him; this sheer resolve was only hardened further by how close he had come to losing Hiccup that night. The memory of Hiccup burning, just waiting for his doom to come in that shed, always made him grip the boy's body a little tighter, his roar ten times louder, and his claws sink into hostiles thrice as hard. If it was what it took to protect his friend, Toothless would gladly become the ruinous devil the humans believed him to be.

But though such sentiment from the dragon was appreciated, it made

things difficult for Hiccup as he tried to adapt to the pure wilderness. Toothless being the one who did all the hunting and foraging, basically pampering the boy, it left him unable to handle things on his own should a true crisis come into play. He had no idea how to take care of himself should he be hungry or sick, not knowing what fruits or plants would serve as medicinal herbs and what would kill him on the spot by poisoning him. Hiccup mentally scolded himself for being stupid enough not to remember Gothi's lessons in medicine â€“ such lessons would have certainly come in handy when treating his burns. Then again, he never expected to be forced to fend for himself on an uncharted island with a dragon as his only companion after nearly being murdered at the hands of his former tribesmen.

They had just now reached the forest, being reminded of the one where they first met back on Berk. Hiccup sighed heavily as the warm sunlight touched their faces in a very similar way as did the whispers of the trees on the wind. That forest was probably the only good memory he had of the island where he was most certain to be miserable for the rest of his days should Toothless never have come into his life. It represented safety to him, and with Toothless always waiting there in that cove to give him a happy nuzzle and a few licks, it felt like home. He wanted more than anything to feel that kind of shelter again in the tranquil openness of nature with his best friend, to know he was home.

Stupid, he thought. He didn't have a home anymore.

* * *

><p>Walking towards the nearest bush, Hiccup saw a good amount of berries that would appease his appetite for a while. He slowly climbed off Toothless and walked over to pick each berry into his open palm. Toothless stayed close while darting around on full alert to make sure no creature lied in wait to attack Hiccup. Hiccup wiped off the berries with his shirt to remove any lingering dirt and swallowed them all into his mouth, chewing slowly and then gulping them down. To any other it would have barely been considered a meal, but his stomach had little room for anything else.<p>

Hiccup wiped his mouth clean and turned back to Toothless. "Alright, bud. I'm finished; let's go back to the cave."

Toothless warbled in defiance. A handful of berries did not count as a full breakfast; Hiccup would be sooner to starve himself on a diet such as that. Humans' stomachs may not have needed as much food as dragons', but Toothless knew the boy would need more food in order to heal properly.

He sniffed the ground looking for an adequate source of nourishment, anything more filling than some tiny little fruits on a bush. Other than dirt and grass, he managed to catch the scent of a few small animals, a rabbit and some squirrels, with just enough meat to keep Hiccup going for a few hours.

He ducked his head in between the boy's legs, earning a startled yelp in return, and followed the scent of the rabbit first. Toothless made sure to even his pace so as to keep the unstable boy from falling off, yet quick enough to close in on the rabbit in a few seconds. The scent had gotten much stronger just as they approached a smaller

clearing in the forest close to a shoreline. Hiccup could smell the salty ocean air enter his nostrils, and it did help to bring back a little more of his appetite.

Breathing it in fully now, he remembered the invigorating rush he felt the last time he breathed it in with Toothless. To have felt so free while at the same time so bound, like a small plant growing from the ground to see the sky yet its roots kept it down to be trampled underneath the feet of others. He should have seen that those roots had been cut then, and realized the second he got on Toothless' back and they flew together just what kind of potential he had, what option was suddenly available with all his dreaming and wishing. They could have left in that moment, they could have left it all behind and never again. With another look at his singed hands Hiccup was starting to wonder if that would have been the better option for everyone.

Toothless' sudden stop snapped Hiccup out of his thoughts as his dragon had managed to track down the rabbit, brown and fuzzy, feasting on small blades of grass seed near the trees. Toothless crouched low to the ground and crept over to the creature silently, his paw steps carefully placed in between the small branches so as not to make a single noise. With his speed and experience in foraging, the rabbit would make an easy catch. Looking up at Hiccup to make sure he was still secured on his back, the Night Fury was slightly surprised to catch the smallest bit of drool coming from his lower lip. He couldn't really hide the sparkle of delight in his eyes or stop himself from smiling gummily; if Hiccup was feeling hungry that meant he was starting to get better.

In his excitement, the dragon pounced out a little too quickly, alerting the rabbit to them and scaring it away. The pair thought they had managed to catch it, but stepping away they only found empty ground beneath their feet. Toothless eagerly chased the small creature through the woods, with Hiccup wrapping his bony limbs around his neck to hold on. With his weakened strength, his grip could only be maintained for a few minutes before he finally slipped off and tumbled to the ground. He rolled onto the dirt and felt a few pebbles puncture his skin, shots of pain coming in from both his arms and legs when he had finally managed to stop.

Hiccup picked himself up and looked towards where Toothless had run off chasing the rabbit. "Toothless? Toothless!?" He called out, but the dragon didn't come.

Getting on his feet, Hiccup continued to stare in the direction Toothless went, being alerted suddenly that this was the first time since arriving on this island that he was left alone. Toothless had always been by his side to provide for him, and in an instant his protective dragon was taken from his side. Hiccup wasn't expecting such a change of circumstances and it did frankly unnerve him a bit as he took in his surroundings. The trees surrounding him were much thicker, and blocked out more sunlight than those at the entrance, making that particular area a little darker. Huddling into himself, he began to feel a little scared wandering around, that instinctual fear every child had of shadows and darkness being triggered by his new surroundings. He walked forward nonetheless, trying to see if he could catch up to Toothless. It was unlikely though at the slow pace he was going, at a walking speed slightly slower than his usual one but he had hope that maybe Toothless would come back for him once he

noticed he was gone.

"Toothless?" His cries out to the Night Fury were steadily growing weaker each time with the fear beginning to creep into his tone. "Where are you?"

He soon found himself jumping at every noise he heard and his pulse quicken with every second he walked. He feared that at any moment, some dangerous creature was going to pounce out and tear him to ribbons. The wildlife he'd heard about to be living in the forests of Berk were indigenous to most islands: boars, wolves, even bears, though he had never actually seen any. He didn't really want to take the chance that he would run into any such animals now in his current state. Even newborns of those species would be able to rip him to pieces.

To make matters worse, he felt by now he was going around in circles, straying from the path after unknowingly taking several turns. Toothless had to be completely out of hearing range, though with his timid voice Hiccup doubted his dragon would be able to hear him even if he strained his own ears. The boy didn't notice it, but the forest seemed to get darker and darker along the way. More sunlight was being blocked out by overgrown needles, leaves, and vines, and now only tiny prickles of it were able to reach the ground. It was hardly enough to illuminate the whole area, and to Hiccup's shaky sight it looked as black as night. Even if Toothless were right next to him right now he wouldn't be able to see the Night Fury's pure black body.

Hiccup was now losing what little stable wits he still possessed. He was beginning to hyperventilate looking around and around, stopping any forward progress and just turning around feeling like he was being closed in. The small pockets of light were starting to disappear in his eyes while he just watched with his heart racing and his face dripping with sweat. He backed away from the fading light until he felt his back press against something that felt to be a tree. At that point he just closed his eyes and begged the gods to let Toothless find him so they could go back to the cave and he could forget this ever happened.

A sharp burst of light accompanied by a loud whoosh startled Hiccup to something right behind him. The faint glow he saw chasing away the darkness in front of him was colored a bright orange, one that haunted him every time night settled in. And his suspicion to what it was did not settle him in any way.

He turned around and his eye snapped open wide at the form of a man dressed head to toe in form-fitting black armor. Two belts fastened to a symbol atop a leather cuirass on his chest, double-layered pauldrons on his shoulders and vambraces with holsters on his arms. Underneath his leather armor seemed to be a one-piece fabric that outlined his lithe and powerful body with sewn lines. Black faulds on his hips, black harnesses wrapped around his legs, and thin knee-length boots covered his lower body. A black helmet concealed his face from Hiccup's view, with sharp flaps similar to Toothless' own, and two eyeholes, one opened and one slit, completely obscured by shadow.

The man was an intimidating figure to say the least, but what caught the boy's attention at that very moment and drew the utmost feelings

of terror was what he held in his hand. A long weapon, a sword, longer than most with an intricately crafted hilt with all sorts of parts and dragon wings extended at the sides.

And the blade was lit with fire.

Hiccup was frozen in place, his gaze dead centered on the flaming blade, just watching its menacing sparks fly free. With the flames came a myriad of darkened thoughts and memories, and in viewing all of them his heart pounded from inside, crashing so audibly he could actually hear it in his ears. He couldn't breathe anymore, his stomach was twisting into painful knots, and all his burns suddenly came to life again. He finally reacted after a few moments â€“ with a terrible shriek and a desperate scramble away from the source. He ducked his head down while continuing to scream once he was a good ways away from the blade, yet the man showed no visible reaction to his outburst.

The man only watched him from where he stood â€“ at least Hiccup thought he was watching since he couldn't really see his eyes. A few minutes passed and by then Hiccup had run out of air to scream with, yet he still cowered watching the flaming sword. But to his surprise, the flames eventually died out, exposing a pristine ebony blade that glistened with an almost ethereal radiance in the shadows even though there was no light to reflect off of it. With the fire gone, Hiccup could see all the runes and markings carved into the steel, but he was more interested in the blade as a whole. It was beautiful, amazing, but more than that, it seemed familiarâ€¦

It was the blade from his dream, he realized. Completed and very much functional.

Hiccup had experienced the dream several times in his stay, being transported back to that circular white chamber with all the pieces splayed out on that table. He had accurately guessed from his repeated experiences that he was supposed to create a working weapon from all those tiny little bits. But throughout the years he could only managed to connect a few pieces together, and that was from hours of fiddling with them. He barely even remembered what the finished product was supposed to look like, and from what he knew of swords they certainly didn't require as many components as that. Some looked like they would be more at home on a bow, like the string, and he found a strange barrel-like piece that he had never seen in his life. To make matters even more difficult his thoughts were clouded and shaky from continuous visions of the night his life was attempted on. The more he worked on that thousand-piece puzzle with no clue of the end result, the more stress he seemed to create for himself. But he hadn't had the dream for over a month now â€“ he figured his subconscious or whatever was causing him to have the dream was finally cutting him a much-needed break.

The man lowered his blade down to his side and took off into the forest without warning. Hiccup was still shaken, but upon noticing the man leave, followed right after him. "H-Hey, wait a minute!" He cried. "Come back!"

The chase went onwards further and further into the woods, with Hiccup swatting low hanging branches after the stranger. It was strange but it almost appeared as if he was vanishing into thin air. He disappeared for one second only to reappear again in another

direction, either on the ground or up above jumping nimbly from tree branch to tree branch. Hiccup also noticed how the man moved without a sound, no footsteps or rustling of leaves, nor did the trees give a little in response to his weight, as if he weighed nothing at all. It was like the man wasn't even really there â€“ could he have been some kind of ghost?

Hiccup spotted a patch of light up ahead while pursuing the man, who vanished heading towards it himself. Shielding his eyes as he approached, Hiccup soon found himself at the edge of the forest overlooking a small meadow with a beach nearby. Over at the meadow in between a sparse amount of mid-sized trees was a small cabin that only looked to have space for a couple of rooms. The cabin had shattered windows and holes in the walls and roof with rotting wood debris scattered everywhere; it indicated that this little house had been abandoned for some time. Hiccup looked around the deserted area, but there was no trace of the man anywhere.

He stepped out to take a look around regardless and try and track down the man. His mind was racing with questions that this armored stranger no doubt had the answers to. Why was he having such strange dreams? What was that weapon, and why did he have to make it? What was that strange hall he always found himself in? And just who was he, for that matter? He had enough problems on hand between his trauma and now a missing dragon to worry about nonsensical visions and wild heroic fantasies based on the unlikely pairing of a child and dragon. After years of searching the gods, trying to make sense of everything that had happened to him, he just wanted to know what was going on, and better yet, how to put an end to it.

The boy was cut off from his inner musings when he was tackled to the ground by something large and heavy. Slammed against the ground, he barely had a second to recover from the sharp, pounding throb in the back of his head when he was assaulted by something long and slimy licking against his face over and over in a frantic manner. The first thing he met when he opened his eyes was a pair of green eyes with black orbs filled with relief.

"Toothless!" He cried. The dragon crooned and warbled with happiness to see that he was alright, and nuzzled his head against Hiccup's cheek. Hiccup hugged his friend's large head and stroked his jawline, earning happy purrs from Toothless. "So I take it you didn't catch that rabbit?" He joked, but Toothless, thinking Hiccup might have been disappointed, ducked his head and let his ears droop down.

"Aw, bud, it's okayâ€¦ I'm just glad you're here." He mumbled while petting the dragon's head again. Toothless responded with a light nudge to the forehead.

Hiccup jolted to attention suddenly and grabbed Toothless' head to ensure he had the Night Fury's full attention. "Hey, Toothless, did you see a man wandering around? He was dressed in black armor and had a weird-looking sword, and his face was covered with a mask â€“ see anybody like that?" Toothless only cocked his head and rumbled in confusion, enough hint to let Hiccup know that he hadn't. The boy sighed and rubbed his head to soothe the throbbing in his cranium. Perhaps there hadn't really been anyone there at all, and he had just imagined some presence where there was only air and darkness. He had been delirious from panic â€“ it was indeed possible that the man he saw had simply been a hallucination brought about by stress. Given

the poor visibility and his failing eyesight, at the most it could have only been a small animal.

Or so he thought, until suddenly he turned away and faced the log cabin, where he found the armored stranger standing a few feet away from the front door. He appeared to be looking at him, but Hiccup couldn't really tell; even in the broad daylight, the open eyehole of the man's mask still blocked out completely. Hiccup stood up as quickly as he could, causing Toothless to jerk his head away while watching his boy point with a shaky finger.

"I-It's him! Toothless, it's him â€“ there he is!" Hiccup shouted to the dragon, but other than the immediate response of surprise at his outburst, Toothless didn't react to the man in any way whatsoever. He just sat back down looking at the space Hiccup pointed to, then back to Hiccup, then back at the space again. Hiccup just stared at him in disbelief. "Toothless, what are you doing? He's right there, can't you see!?"

And that was just the thing â€“ he couldn't. To Toothless, there wasn't anything there but a human home long ruined by dragons most likely, and left with the elements to tear it down further. No matter how Hiccup screamed or how hard he focused his eyes with the boy's assurance, there was absolutely no one there. Hiccup only looked at his dragon disbelievingly until he had started to get this impression that the mysterious man was invisible to Toothless. Maybe he was the only one that could see the man â€“ maybe he was hallucinating after all. He saw the man step towards the battered door of the house, but rather than open the door like any normal human would, the figure instead faded away just as he reached it.

Startled, Hiccup chased after the man once more, with Toothless following close behind, starting to worry even more for his boy's well-being. With his solid material form, Hiccup couldn't follow in the stranger's example and instead grabbed the door and swung it open. The hinges on the door had been so weak that by the time the door opened fully they broke loose; Hiccup had been forced to let go as the door fell to the ground with a heavy thud. Looking inside the old house, he saw the remains of what assumedly was furniture, broken and ripped apart, littered all over the place. From desks and shelves to tables and chairs, along with a cold fireplace with several stones missing from it: those were the only things discernible from what could best be put as garbage. Several of the support beams had been cracked and toppled over, crashed on top of the wrecked furniture â€“ it was honestly a surprise the whole house hadn't given way yet with this dilemma. With all the light filtering in from the old windows, Hiccup had a clear view of everything, even the dirt that had collected on the ripped fabrics littered around, but the man was nowhere to be seen.

"Just what is going on?" Hiccup asked, fervently wondering if he would ever really know.

* * *

><p>Hiccup's having a rough time of it, eh? But the fic is called Dragon's Hero, and most heroes do have to undergo great trials in order to become who they are. Hope your excited for how this turns out, and remember, if you have any suggestions, let me know and I'll see what I can do.

As always, review, favorite, follow. Till next time!

11. Chapter 11

Hello, Fanfiction!

By popular demand I am back with this, the REAL chapter 11! Thanks for being patient regarding this new chapter; I would have posted it sooner but you know, I just got that burned out Spring Break mentality. So to make up for it I am giving you now this big, juicy 10,000-word chapter! And thanks to everyone who answered my little survey question â€“ I suppose I should feel silly for asking that to a bunch of clear Httyd fans. Of course if you're undecided or just haven't answered yet, that's okay too. The question is still open: Dragon's Hero sequel or BH6 fanfic? You decide!

Speaking of BH6, I am aware that there's been some friction between the fanbases due to Disney walking away once again with the Academy Award and just recently with the Kids' Choice Award, especially on Tumblr. As a fan of both films, I just wanna say â€“ chill out, people. Look, we all know that the Academy is biased and doesn't give two shits about animation. A friend of mine pointed out how last year everyone either voted for Frozen or they just abstained. And they call Princess Kaguya 'chinese f*ing shit that no one saw,' or something to that effect. Look, the Oscars are just big as far as Hollywood's concerned, and in my opinion, it's still great that it even got a nomination. I bet people are still freaking out over the LEGO movie snub. BH6 was a great movie and it had some pretty awesome work done on it; good for them, I say. But Httyd still got the Golden Globe and 6 Annie Awards, including the top award for Best Animated Film, awards that are supposed to recognize true excellence in animation. That should be the big win here, people.**

As for Kids' Choice Awards, let's face it. Httyd2 was awesome and it had a great story, but that story might have been a bit too grown up for kids. Let's just be happy it got what it did, and helped Dreamworks out of its slump a bit. And let's also be pumped for the soon-to-come third season of the series, 'Dragons: Race to the Edge.'

Now, onto replies.

CMR Rosa: Regarding your private message, when I said there would be some Hiccstrid moments, I did not mean romance. Like you said, that's pretty much out of the question now and I personally HATE it when fanfics take that turn. I just meant some little one on one moments with them. Make of them what you will when they happen, just know I am not looking to make this a romance fic. Especially now that every 1 in 3 new or updated stories is a romance.

Warrior Nun: As always, your supportive comments are appreciated. Thanks for understanding.

Love It: Wow, you got a dark mind. I'll see what I can do, since I'm also one of those 'Hiccup-getting-back-at-Berk' lovers. I think that's the case for anyone who might have had bullying problems, to see Hiccup standing up for himself. And it never hrts to have a dragon with you.

Katie1211: I'm not sure I could keep up with such a constant schedule considering all the outside stuff I have to worry about. But I'll take your advice, just write this out and see how it goes. It's certainly nice to see how warm a response this story seems to be getting. I can only hope I'll still have your interest once we get through this first arc.

Hellsider: You're free to explore your ideas if you want. Personally, I think that would be just awesome, if people started doing fanfics connected to mine in the universe I've set up. Take it where you want to, imagine your own kind of ideas for where this could go. I know there are some based on 'Nightfall,' the feral-Hiccup AU. I hope as I keep this up, I'll give you guys some ideas.

WhiteWinterStar: Yes, Hiccup has a bit of a Zuko-scar now. The difference is there's still some eyebrow left, LOL. And expect a costume change in the future, for sure.

Inquisitor0: I explored some of your ideas, but Hiccup's a stubborn kid. Even if it would build up immunities, I don't think there's any way Hiccup would eat something Toothless barfed up on a daily basis. As for your honey-idea, well, just read the chapter.

Everyone else, I hear your pleas, your responses, and all I have to say is wait and see! Now, on with the chapter!

All rights to Httyd belong to Cressida Cowell and Dreamworks.

* * *

><p>Hiccup was resting upon a small rock by the lake near his cave, curled up on himself with his back along the wet moss growing along the stone's surface and scratching his nails along the ruined, crusty threads of his bandages to reach an itch in his bad eye that had been bothering him for a few minutes. His bones felt stiff from his hunched over position, coupled with the lack of exercise from spending days on end inside his cave, despite Toothless' worried protests.<p>

The dragon in question was curled up around the rock, napping soundly while remaining alert right by his boy's side. His ears perked up at the slightest crack of the branch or chirp of a wild bird or squirrel, leaving the matter of whether or not he was actually getting any rest at all debatable.

It was already a few hours into the morning and it was pretty clear to see with the abundance of cloud cover they could hardly expect a sunny day. Back on Berk, a sunny day was as common as seeing his father happy, but spending seven years of his life there attuned Hiccup to certain signs in the weather â€“ when it would rain, when it would snow, when it would snow really hard, and when it was just going to be a chilly day. Looking around and seeing his own puffs of breath in front of him, Hiccup guessed it wouldn't be long before the snow would start to settle in and all the vibrant green would be dyed a frosty white. His dragon's internal flame provided a satisfactory level of warmth despite the cold weather; just another perk to having a dragon for a best friend, he figured.

The weather and advantages his scaled companion brought in response to it were the last thing on his mind, though. His foremost thoughts as he massaged his scarred eye beneath the layers of fabric revolved around his ethereal encounter with the mysterious stranger in the woods only days ago. The phantom he wasn't really sure was even there wielding the very blade he wasn't even sure he'd imagined.

Too many conflicting factors were present in that situation to properly distinguish as to whether it was some waking dream or if it had all really happened. From the accounts of his dragon, he had been the only one who saw him, even when he stood there in front of the both of them in a time and place where only blindness could have excused missing him; that would only reinforce the idea that he had been daydreaming or simply hallucinating due to injuries or hunger.

Then again, it was quite impossible for shadows like the ones surrounding him in that moment to create an illusionary source of light, namely the fire that coated the blade. Any stress or fear-addled child would attest to how shadows at night would warp the forms of harmless objects and make them appear threatening and terrifying, barring them a decent night's rest. But that was all â€“ they could only bend form and prey on fear to distort sound â€“ for them to replicate their polar opposite was just not possible.

But beyond the blade's flames that still terrified him, or his questionable presence, what really grabbed Hiccup's attention was the figure's mask. Or more specifically, what lied behind the mask. When he managed to push back the fear and block out the flames from his memory, he remembered how even the glow could not illuminate the small spots for his eyes to break through â€“ behind the leather covering was nothing but a pitch blackness. A void, an emptiness that barred any sense of life the young child might have picked up from whoever was wearing the suit, if there was anyone at all. The boy wondered for a moment if there was, in fact, no one wearing the suit at all, and what he had seen was just an enchanted armor made to move by some disembodied will.

And from there came the random thought so foreign it felt implanted by some unseen force just as the blade's image had: what if someone had yet to don the armor?

He groaned in frustration and let himself slide back on the rock and lean onto Toothless' forepaw, eyeing the scars on his arms. His burns hadn't been bothering him as much, aside from being a fright to look at, once he finally remembered to apply a little honey on them. He remembered the healers saying how it prevented infection from settling in, as once the injury reached that point, the limb was as good as gone. It had been no trouble to scour the forest and gather the substance from the trees and apply it to his skin liberally. He remembered how healing using this method had always taken a while, and yet he had already started to see results, the burns looking less raw and wrinkly by the minute.

He had considered deeply using them for the burns on his wrists and eye as well, and yet, for some strange reason, he didn't want to touch them. Each time, he would remove the bandages and come forth with a handful of honey to rub on the wounds, and they would only hover merely inches away from the very eye that had been burned. It made no sense to him as to why he would want the burn intact, and

sometimes he wouldn't even be able to even pull back the fabric and expose the wound for treatment. The whole reason he'd covered his eye in the first place was so he wouldn't have to look at it, and though the burn would not fade entirely, the honey would still allow it to heal efficiently.

Hiccup's mind had been so focused on the flames and injuries they had caused that he hadn't noticed himself standing and wandering off on its own. Toothless had, and quickly got up trotting after him to wherever he was going, barking and grunting all the way to get his attention but to no avail. Hiccup's legs moved with a will that was not his in the least, carrying him past scores and scores of trees in the thick wood near his cave while he remained lost in thought. Also unbeknownst to him was the fact that he was taking the exact same path he was taking yesterday through the forest when he had darted around in panic, his body itself memorizing each and every step taken as if they had been done so a thousand times over.

A momentary pause occurred when he arrived at the exact same spot where he saw the armored stranger and his ignited sword, but no such realization of this fact came to the young boy's mind. Substantial amounts of light filtering in from the foliage above set the area in stark contrast to the total darkness that existed the moment the meeting of sorts happened.

As if it were even possible Toothless became more worried when Hiccup's body began to pour with sweat and his pupils shrunk â€“ his whole body seemed to exude fear. The Night Fury warbled and licked Hiccup's hand to grab his attention but to no avail. He only remained a moment longer before his feet picked up and he started to move onward with Toothless on his tail once more.

* * *

><p>By the time Hiccup's senses returned to him, he found himself standing at the very beach with the abandoned cabin by the forest's edge. The strong breeze across the water blew across his face and he turned to the sight of the ocean, sparkling blue with the sun's reflection on its surface. Gazing out to a destination unknown to him on the horizon, he turned back to the ruined shack, seemingly ready to collapse at any moment. For a moment, he almost expected the stranger to make a reappearance and terrify him with his blade and mysterious presence once again.<p>

The thought quickly faded out, though when he inspected the cabin more closely through its shattered windows and the holes in the walls, seeing the ruined remains of the furniture and the broken weapons and possessions inside. Though broken and rotting, at one point it must have been a beautiful home, at the very least suitable enough for the person who lived here. On an uninhabited island teeming with dangerous wildlife, the owner of this house had somehow managed to make a living before fate struck and his abode fell into disrepair.

And how had he performed compared to that? For all his efforts, he and Toothless had only barely managed to survive on this island, even if he had done so for two years. Sure he could get away with saying that he was only nine years old and hardly knew the first thing about living on his own in the wilderness with only a dragon to assist him. But still, he wasn't about to become some feral dragon boy living off

of nuts and berries and squawking like some Nadder hyped on fish. The fact was that he was in dire need of basic survival gear and supplies; he had put it off long enough to be frank.

He finally noticed Toothless nudging him frantically and trying to climb onto him once his body was turned to face him. "Toothless, we need to get some stuffâ€¦" he said to the black dragon, looking down at his bandages. The crusted, stiff fabric reeking of burnt skin and an aged combination of the elements was in dire need of changing for some time.

Toothless cocked his head, silently asking for clarification. Hiccup gestured to the old cabin behind him. "We need stuff: food, fresh water, tools for living in the wild. Whoever lived here obviously knew what they were doing while we've just been winging it on some random island we landed on. If we're gonna be in a cave in the woods for the rest of our lives, we need to be prepared for it."

Toothless growled and shrieked indignantly, swinging his head in fierce refusal. He understood that humans weren't fully capable of efficiently living off the land like they were, especially hatchlings like his Hiccup. But gathering the items Hiccup claimed he needed, human items, was to go to a human village and take them, and the last thing he wanted was for his boy to get near the creatures that were the direct cause of his misery.

Humans didn't care who they hurt, especially Hiccup's kind â€“ it was all a ridiculously cruel series of attempts to flaunt their superiority to other living beings and satisfy their lust for bloody glory. The wounds of the day they left that gods-forsaken rock still burned in the memory of the dragon as it must have for Hiccup; though the young Night Fury's focus was on saving his boy, he was unable to avoid taking in the scenery around him as he moved forward. The raging, manic way they fought, the profane insults spouted towards his kind, it had all sounded so natural, that violence and gore a blatant penchant for every Viking he had seen. He knew once he found Hiccup terrified out of his mind in that shack that even one of their own, a child no less, was not exempt from that, most especially one who embodied the weakness and hesitation they abhorred so greatly. If Hiccup needed help to survive, then he would become stronger to protect him. Until then, he would be safe here, away from them.

"I know it's risky, bud, but we don't have a choice." Hiccup said to calm the panicked dragon down. But Toothless only shrieked and barked even more, bouncing his feet and slamming his tail hard on the ground to affirm his position. "Toothless, stop! Just cool it!"

The dragon only complained even further, escalating his complaints into full blown roars with slit eyes and teeth extended out to their full length. Hiccup tried to move aside from his dragon to avoid a confrontation, only for the Night Fury to leap in front of him no matter which direction he turned and continued to block Hiccup before he could even take a step further. He screeched at such a volume that he ran the risk of hacking out whatever internal organ allowed him to do so at the ridiculous stubbornness of his friend.

"Toothless, there's no arguing this! I can't last without that stuff, I don't even know how I lasted this long! We need to go and get it all!" He cried, only for Toothless to refuse even harder.

Neither side, it seemed, was able to pick up on the turbulent distress that flowed in the other for all their bickering on what course of action to take. It wasn't the first time that Toothless wished he could speak so he could tell Hiccup just how much it hurt, practically devastated him when Hiccup had nearly lost his life to the humans and instead had appeared to have lost his very spirit. His forgiving nature was something a dragon, who more often than not upheld grudges just as they upheld loyalty, could hardly understand.

Even in the forests of Berk when he would be bit by snakes or squirrels or tackled by small boars he would simply let it go, even if he ended up paying for it with a small fever or festering wounds afterwards. He would always tell Toothless it was all right, smiling gently even when covered in bloody cuts and bruises. The humans that deliberately hurt his boy as opposed to random dumb animals acting from instinct simply weren't worthy of that forgiveness, no matter how willing his boy might have been to give it.

Toothless would have ranted further regardless of Hiccup's attempts to pacify him until he caught the scent of something on the breeze. A familiar smell from years past, of carved wood, animal fur and steel carried on into his nostrils even amidst the heavy aroma of the salt water. He stood to attention with his ear plates up and his eyes turned to slits with Hiccup's arms frozen in extension towards him, turning his head every which way until it settled on a specific spot out on the ocean.

Hiccup only stared at his Night Fury in confusion before he turned to face the horizon himself, and what he saw was enough to send a strong jolt of shock up his spine and throughout his system. It caused his one good eye to widen considerably and even his damaged eye to crack open a ways from beneath the bandages. There, out on the open water, was a ship, armed with spears jutting out from its sides and adorned with colorful wooden shields. The great sail tied to the mast blew forward in accordance with the wind â€“ the symbol painted upon it was unrecognizable to the boy, yet the horned helmet shape was enough of a clue. It was a Viking ship, the belonging tribe unknown to him but a Viking vessel nonetheless.

For a moment, Hiccup was unsure whether to feel joyful at the prospect of seeing humans again after two years alone with only a dragon for company or terrified since those same humans unfortunately happened to be Vikings. It stirred a sense of cold anticipation within him, a tsunami's force of anxiety surging throughout his frail frame.

Amidst that, however, he did wonder how and why people would come across this island after two long years; he figured from looking at the aged cabin that this place had been abandoned for some time and had simply been forgotten about.

He wanted to open himself up to the slight possibility that these were just weary sailors happening upon this place by chance on a return voyage home. Yet he remembered when his father told him of something important, a rite-of-passage for young Vikings in training, and a manner of training in wilderness survival. Searching for an island devoid of habitation with unknown geography and wildlife that would test their ability to think on their feet. It was to be yet another milestone in his life that would come without any debate,

though now it seemed an entire lifetime apart.

Toothless nudged and nudged Hiccup to spur his movement, hard enough to risk pushing him to the ground, but to no avail. The boy's eyes remained locked on the ship, coming ever closer to the shoreline. In aggravated panic, Toothless chomped on the boy's shoulder, being sure to retract his teeth before doing so, and dragged him over to the edge of the forest and dove under the bushes. The dragon could only hope while peeking out through the leaves and thin branches that the humans on that boat had not seen them or had dismissed them for something else. Hiccup, meanwhile, had finally snapped from his daze and zoned back in on the beach, scrambling from his clumsily placed position down on the ground and scrambled over to peer through himself just as the impending moment arrived.

The ship pulled in on the beach only meters away from the shore, the oars that paddled across the water dropping to the sides of the vessel and the large stone serving as its anchor dropping into the water. Hiccup gulped heavily feeling almost as if he had been caught just from the menacing look passed from the lifeless wood-carved serpent's head protruding from the bow.

Crashing down upon the sand, the group of Vikings sailing the vessel all crashed down on the beach, their fur garments wet from sweat and seawater. They were all men of varying ages, some men as old as his father and Gobber with thick, bristling beards, while others were in their teenage years; they were all armed to the teeth with swords, axes and shields, a look of deranged bloodlust in their eyes that confirmed to the boy what he surely felt upon seeing the men, fear and dread.

"So, ya think there're any dragons here?" One of the teenage Vikings asked.

"Hmm, I could'a sworn I saw one of those devils a little while before we anchored," said one of the other boys. Hiccup let out a quiet sharp gasp â€“ they _had_ spotted him, and it was his fault for freezing like an idiot and giving them the chance, and it would be his fault as well if they were found and killed. Toothless nudged him softly telling him not to worry in his own reassuring way.

"What kind do you think it was?" The first teenager asked again. "You know, from what I saw I could swear that it had pitch black scales."

"Wouldn't be tha first time yur eyes played tricks on you," one of the older men replied for the first time. "Could'a just been a black bear cub fur all you knowâ€¦"

"Shut up! I know what I saw, and it definitely looked like a dragon. In fact, I'll bet it was one of those Night Furies I've heard so much about!" The boy said with a kind of dark excitement, like he was ready to pull out his axe and start chopping every tree down in the forest looking for his prize. Again, Hiccup gasped and shuddered.

"Please, the unholy offspring of lightnin' and death itself?" The second of the older men asked with a clearly skeptical tone. "Don' count on seein' one at all let alone one in broad daylight! And pray ta Odin tha ya never do spot one, lest ya plan on dyin' young! You're

lucky enough as it is tha' a Night Fury hasn' been seen in years."

Now that got Hiccup's attention. He already knew that Night Furies were rare based on the fact that there was little to no information about them in the Book of Dragons. The breed his companion dragon belonged to was known solely by reputation, any other statistics like its full size or its fire type or max speed all anyone's guess. If they truly were such a deadly dragon, then Hiccup could understand why the lack of details in the book added to peoples' worry over their disappearance â€“ nothing scared people quite like the unknown.

In fact, years ago when he was younger, he had asked about the kinds of dragons he and the other men faced in the raids. It bothered him quite a bit when the men in fervent anger over their mugs of mead got a bit more into detail about the dragons than necessary with all their more dangerous attributes. Yet he still recalled that they mentioned only the common breeds, from Nadders to Gronkles to Nightmares, with the occasional Zippleback or other above average dragon here and there. Never any Night Furies â€“ that would have to have come up if the dragon was really as infamous as the book mentioned. Could Toothless have really been the first Night Fury to appear in years, and what could have happened to them for no one to have seen one in all that time?

"Aw, man, no Night Furies? What a bummerâ€¦" spoke the last teenager among the youths in clear disappointment, scratching his hung head. "You'd be, like, _legendary_ if you got the chance to kill one of themâ€¦"

"Tha's _if_ you found one, _and _survivedâ€¦" The second older man stated.

"Come on, it's a dragon!" The first teen shouted in exasperation. "A stupid, vicious, destructive monster! What makes a Night Fury any more dangerous than the rest of 'em?" Toothless angrily growled at the brazen youth's insults just quietly enough to avoid being heard.

"Perhaps ya need ta clean ou' yer earholes, lad; ah said it's the 'unholy offspring of lightnin' and death.' Dragons don' get nicknames like tha' withou' sumthin ta back it up." The second man spoke again.

"Aye, stories say the demons only strike under tha cover of night. Never showin' themselves, never stealing like the others, only goes flyin' around lookin fur new targets." The first man spoke in a low and dangerous voice to build the ominous mood. "And never once had there been a tale of a Night Fury missin' its target; once you hear its ghastly screech from aboveâ€¦ yur already dead." Hiccup could hear the teens audibly flinch from those last few words, their typical Viking bravado crumbling away.

A beat passed without a single word from the seconds-ago highly ambitious teen Vikings, until the third one spoke again with a slight tremor to his tone. "Uhâ€¦ ah, forget it, who cares? Like we need to waste our time worrying about some fairy-tale dragon! Right, guys?"

"Y-yeah, right! Forget that dumb thing!"

"Right, there are still plenty of dragons to kill around here, no doubt." The second replied, followed by the mocking laughter of the two older men. "Okay, okay, yeah, real funny. Do you really think there are dragons on this island?"

"Are you kiddin? The bloody beasts are everywhere! Like a disease, they are!" The first man laughed. "Makes fur an interestin' hunt, eh? The fun's in tha variety, I always say."

"Aye, who knows what kinda prize yul find in these out of the way places? I bet whoever lived in this sad lit'l shack culd vouch fur tha!" A cacophony of cruel laughter sounded from both men and boys after the second man's comment. It made the boy's trembling, bony hands clench the grass and rip the blades from the earth with his knuckles, visible from underneath his already pale skin, turn a ghostly white. His teeth gritted hard from behind pursed lips, restraining himself from yelling out.

"So, which dragon you lads looking to bring down?" The first man asked.

"Well, I'm hoping we'll see a Monstrous Nightmare hereâ€¦" the third teen said. "Next to those Night Furies, that's like, _the _dragon to kill. Seriously, how awesome would it be to take down something only the best Vikings can go after?

"I'm hoping I can get the wings! I'm thinkin' to just yank 'em right out!" The first teen said with equal amounts of wickedness in both tone and face.

"Are you kidding?" The second one shouted. "You'll end up yanking out the guts and bones with it!"

"I know! That's the coolest part; hacking 'em off with an axe is way too clean!"

"Yeah, I bet that'll score ya some points with the girls!" Another round of mocking laughter followed. The two hidden refugees shared the same feelings of revulsion dropping down into their stomachs like rocks with every word spoken by the Vikings and every callous chuckle let loose from their massive mouths. Hiccup had never felt more sick in his life, and to think it would be caused by words so commonplace to a child of his heritage. He had to stifle an audible choke with both his hands, continuing to shudder all the while.

"Eh, what was tha?" The first man asked.

He had heard him. Hiccup's breath hitched.

Hiccup began to panic as he saw the large Viking trudged towards the bush where they were hiding. He flinched back and huddled in on himself while Toothless crawled in front of him, nearly on top of him, and crouched down ready to fight if need be. He bared his teeth and turned his eyes to slits, already beginning to slowly build up the gases in his throat for a lethally-aimed plasma blast.

The man reached their hiding place and started combing over the foliage for signs of anything suspicious. Perhaps a wild animal or a

dragon, an easy first kill for their young charges and something to get the blood going, even if it might only turn out to be a worthless prize like some Terrible Terror. Luckily Toothless and Hiccup were so close to the bush and well hidden in its shadow that he was unable to spot them, the Night Fury's black hide probably mistaken for a dark patch of dirt.

The Viking looked over the bush and continued to scan the ground behind it nonetheless, his line of sight was too close to spotting his tiny form behind his dragon guardian. Hiccup bit down hard on his lip, his heartbeat racing, pounding in his ears, drops of sweat running down his face from both fear and the body heat of Toothless's belly so close to him. Toothless's frantic exhaling so close to him only further added to the adrenaline, by now ready to squeeze their hearts until they burst. Yet both kept as silent as possible with the knowledge that one stray sound could lead to both their deaths.

His eyes widened as the man leaned in closer; any further and they would be spotted for sure. From his position on the ground he could see the man's hand reaching to his side for his axe. This was it, they were caughtâ€¦

"Oy, what're you doin'?" The second man called from back on the beach. "There's nothin' there, now stop wastin' time an' let's get ta huntin!"

"All righ', keep yer skivvies on!" The first man called back and returned to his companions. Hiccup let out a silent breath of relief while Toothless steeped back and let him sit upright. The dragon gave a small coo and nudged his cheek, his way of asking if he was alright.

"I'm fine, budâ€¦ come on, let's get out of here." Hiccup said tiredly.

And with that, Hiccup climbed atop the back of his dragon and they took off, shooting through the tall pines and into the sky. The men below might have heard them, but Hiccup was more focused on simply getting out of there; in fact he was sure of it when he heard the faint shouts from behind them and saw them running back to the ship and hurriedly readying their bolas to attempt to catch the two of them. It hardly mattered though â€“ by the time they had their nets prepared they would be long out of range. Even the strongest Viking could not throw his net far enough to ensnare such a small target. Never had Hiccup been so grateful that Night Furies could not match up to other dragons in size.

Even as the two flew away from their little mock-home of two years, Hiccup still felt that same horrified sickness in his stomach, hardly having relented at all in the few moments it took to get the two of them airborne. He had thought it was simply the adrenaline taking some time to die down, but in trying to accept that, something in his chest constricted and the sick feeling doubled in his stomach. Those words of theirs, the cruel way they talked and looked down on dragons as mere game to be huntedâ€¦

He wasn't stupid â€“ in fact even as a child his intelligence could easily rival that of the smartest adult Vikings in his village, despite anyone's proud denial. It was only natural that Toothless, a dragon, would hate humans, but he couldn't say he shared in that

hatred, even if it might have seemed easier to. After all, who was he to stand in judgment of an entire race of people? He had always argued that it was just one little island. The world, he had always imagined, was much bigger than that, something he now knew for sure once he experienced flight for the first time and saw the infinite expanse of the sky. He had always wanted to leave what had happened to him as an isolated incident and let himself forget about it while he remained on that island, forgotten by the world.

But the world still had more to show him.

* * *

><p>They continued to press on even as night fell over the archipelago, and the sky was once again dotted with stars. It was one of Hiccup's favorite parts about living on that island, how he'd get to lay down and look up and lose his grip on his stark reality staring at those million points of light in total silence. No noisy Vikings trudging down the paths with their massive footsteps 'whispering' to each other in hardly-hushed tones or torches lit withâ€¦ fire to block the beautiful view. It never put a smile on his face, but it did always help to relax him, and it was always fun to make up their own little constellations in the stars. Looking up at it now, from a dragon's eye view, Hiccup was finally able to breathe in and let both his stomach and nerves cool down.

"Okay, Toothless, I think it's safe to say we're now out one home." Hiccup mused, with his dragon purring in agreement from under him. "Let's see if there are any other random, out-of the-way islands we can live on. But firstâ€¦"

Toothless growled. He knew what was coming.

"Oh, come on!" Hiccup shouted. "Toothless, you know I'm not equipped for this! I need stuff, and we've gotta go get it!" Toothless roared back in anger once again, firmly making his point. "Look, one island, just something to help me get some food myself."

Toothless gave a strong growl of disdain for his friend's stubbornness, but that growl was cut short once he picked up on a distant sound. Jerking his head to attention, he lifted his ear plates once more to fix in on the distinctly familiar sound. The flaps only flickered once or twice, yet the young Night Fury's gaze was unflinching as he stared into the distance.

"Toothless? What's wrong?" Hiccup asked, but the dragon needed not to reply as Hiccup soon came face to face with his answer. A large light could be seen from what they assumed to be a landmass up ahead, colored a haunting shade of orange. A glint of fear shone in his eyes even in the darkness, seeming to reflect the glow miles from its actual location, and like many other times today when things had failed to come into his notice until long after they happened, he had begun hyperventilating. The burning glow, the sounds of dragons roaring.

The island was in the midst of a dragon raid.

Already the boy began to feel light-headed from all the rapid breathing he had done so far; he actually wished at that moment that

he would just faint already into the ocean. The frigid waters may very well kill him but at least that horrifying fiery blaze would be out of his sight. The moment his grip on Toothless's scaly flesh had begun to falter, his dragon jerked him back to reality once more with an actual jerk of his back. Hiccup regained his composure and practically glued himself to his dragon's back, clenching his eyes shut and maybe just trying to forget he had ever seen or heard any of it.

Toothless swerved and spiraled down towards the thick forest away from the village, landing in a dense area of trees so as to keep him away from the fire. The second the dragon's paws touched ground, though, Hiccup slipped limply off of his side and collapsed onto the grass surrounding them. Instinctively he curled in on himself and continued to shudder and take in rapid, now shaky breaths, grasping his head and shutting his eyes. Already he could feel the memories leaking in, dripping down like poison into his mind and plaguing him with visions. Toothless was by his side in an instant, frantically barking, groaning, and nudging him to break him out of his trance.

"It's okay, Toothless, really. I'm okayâ€¦" Hiccup said while stifling a groan, clutching his head and rising to his feet, though he was anything but fine in truth. Already he could hear voices, too familiar voices screaming in his head.

"_Useless, good-fur-nuthin' brat!"_

"_Ugh, why'd a weakling like you even have to be born?"_

"_You're no Viking! You should have burned!"_

As quickly as they came, the voices of Hiccup's once-fellow tribesmen were silenced out once he took hold of Toothless's side and regained his balance and focus on the present. It was more or less an accident that they were here now, but they might as well make the most of it and obtain the supplies they needed. He had hoped to have something to trade with, but swiping them in the midst of the chaos would work just as well.

"Let's goâ€¦" was all the boy said before he sprinted off. The dragon startled back a bit in surprise for but a split-second before following his boy over to the village, letting the light of the fire guide their way.

Though it felt like he was about to lose his mind with terror and start screaming until his lungs exploded Hiccup continued on. Although he was able to note how quickly his pace began to slow, from a run to a jog to a simple walk, and then to just inching forward. The more his speed began to drop though, the more his eyes began to widen, the louder the voices in his head became, the wider his eyes became until they bulged out of his eyelids. Now, standing on the forest's edge, the calming darkness no longer able to shelter him or the light of the stars unable to soothe him, he could see it all in perfect clarity.

Many things were different, such as the faces and armor of the Vikings, the placement of houses or the type of weapons used. Yet too much more was the same: the same cacophony of cries for blood, the same panic that bled through the village, flooding it like a torrent

of water, and the same flames. The very same all-consuming flames eating away at both wood and flesh.

Gods, those flamesâ€¦ those terrible flamesâ€¦

The screams drowned out and now all he could hear was the terrible roaring of those flames, the raging inferno roaring like the dragons that created them. Even from a distance, the heat could be felt, overwhelming him with nausea. He blinked for but a second, but when he opened his good eye again, suddenly everything in sight had been caught in the hellfire, the whole island burning away to nothing.

How Hiccup wanted to scream when all that came out was a sorry little whimper, and when his damaged eye began to flared to life once more. It seethed with shots of pain that spiked out in full and left dull aches before spiking again, like it had been run through multiple times by swords dipped in candle wax and lava. The scattered sparks that flew out and danced on the wind and he flinched back, seeing tiny little claws reaching to grab him and burn him.

Tripping on his feet, he leaned back and felt a push on his back keeping him from falling to the ground. The whole world seemed to blur and rock left and right; looking to the sky, he could swear he saw the stars spiral around and dim and flash all at once. Yet what disturbed him more was how the shapes of the dragons began to change overhead, their forms becoming cloaked in darkest shadow. Even the angered light of the flames could not illuminate their now pitch black bodies, still visible perhaps due to their density. Wisps of pitch black smoke seemed to emit from their bodies, trailing behind them and seeming to pollute the air. It could have been just his nerves influencing his imagination, but he could swear something about those new forms seemedâ€¦ unnatural, vile.

Foregoing any further hallucinations he turned back to see it was once again Toothless coming to his aid. With a shove, the dragon used his snout to push Hiccup back upright and wormed his head underneath Hiccup's bony little arm.

"I'm alright, bud, reallyâ€¦" was the only answer he gave to the little Night Fury's now more worry-laced than ever coo. In an effort to reassure them both Hiccup simply grasped his sides with all the might his bony body could usher out. The both stared at the chaos that now ensured, the battle's reality now in focus to both of themâ€¦

And in they ran.

The pair rushed through the village weaving through burning buildings and narrow passes between houses that burst into flame every moment on either side. They ducked and dodged past every Viking caught up in the intensity of battle and slid underneath the bellies of dragons that landed right on the spot in front of them. Hiccup even leaped onto Toothless' back to jump over a large pole that had been shot down by a Nightmare's blast and sent rolling down. They never faltered even as the battle reached higher levels of brutality, with screams of anguish indistinguishable between species. For once it might actually have been good that a raid was going on that no one, human or dragon, would notice a Night Fury running around.

They managed to make it into a healer's hut near the edge of the village without anyone detecting them by skidding in through the doorway. Once again he luckily went unnoticed by the scurrying healers in the rush of new patients to cure, running around to gather every roll of bandage and herb on the shelf and barking out orders or new supplies and holding down patients stubbornly eager to get back in the action.

Hiccup dashed into the corners of the hut and crawled as quietly and quickly as he could through the dark spots. He couldn't even count how many times he had to zip his hands away before some random person could step on them or hide behind a shelf or bed. He eventually managed to swipe some new bandages and healing herbs from a low shelf and made his way out, not bothering to crawl in favor of just getting out.

He found Toothless hiding behind the building as soon as he made his way out, and the dragon frantically galloped to him and nuzzled him in relief. "I'm okay, Toothless. I got the stuff, now let's get-"

But he was cut off as once more the world began to distort until it warped away in a flash, only to be replaced by what seemed to be some apocalyptic parody. The village still remained, or some semblance of it; now it was in total ruin, the broken remains obscured by some thick bog that covered the ground. It gave the look and feel of a graveyard, whatever lives being here long since gone and forgotten by time.

The only forms of life were the dragons, yet now they appeared just as they had in his hallucination moments ago. Pure black, their bodies emitting a strange shadowy smoke, yet the texture of their hides could be seen from within â€“ decaying and scabbed, their wings shredded beyond repair, like some manner of living carcass. They appeared to have bones jutting from their bodies in some armor-like fashion, dirty, greyish and cracked.

Hiccup was drawn most especially to their eyes, or rather the lack thereof, replaced by empty sockets where their eyes should have been, with burning crimson-red dots within. The demented creatures exuded some kind of horrific viciousness beyond even the frightening tales he had heard in his younger years as they stomped around almost lifelessly. It was all Hiccup could do to watch and take in one shuddering breath of putrid-smelling air after another with a foulness unlike anything he had ever experienced filling him as he looked at these nightmarish monsters, seemingly devoid of any kind of heart or soul.

"W-Whaâ€¦ what is this? Are thoseâ€¦ really dragons?" He asked quietly. "No, no way. They can't beâ€¦ what are those thingsâ€¦?"

He just stared at them, trudging along without taking any notice of him, feeding off of something upon the ground. He heard a sickening squelch and crunch and saw what looked to be a Viking's arm in the demon's mouth, without any flesh and several holes available to spot the bones underneath. The sounds of the dragonesque creature chewing was enough to shake the boundaries of the illusion, vapor like shrouds of dream-space surging and rippling outward. He wanted to throw up every bit of bile that had collected in him watching these things while he braced himself along the wall of the now-ravaged

healer's hut he just escaped. More than that, though, he wanted this to end, he wanted to see no more of this terror.

"T-Toothlessâ€¦" he whimpered, the blood long since drained from his face. "Toothless, where are you? Please help meâ€¦ Toothlessâ€¦" He ducked down and shut his eyes to block the creatures' ghastliness. They, however, took notice of him and started to drudge forward, appearing to limp on long-since broken limbs. Their growls sounded twisted and erratic, their breaths smelling like ashes, and their 'eyes' glowing a deep shade of blood red.

"Toothlessâ€¦ help, pleaseâ€¦ I'm scaredâ€¦ Toothless!" He cried.

The whole of the illusionary world and all the power it had on his senses was shattered the instant he heard a high-pitched scream. A scream that wasn't his. And suddenly he found himself back in the raided Viking village, the same as when he had left it. Toothless's face was the first thing that came into his vision, right on top of him with his claws on his chest, nudging and licking him to break the spell his clearly out-of-control mind held on him.

The scream sounded again and Hiccup let out a sharp gasp when he saw the source; a young girl about his age being cornered by a Deadly Nadder, cocking its head and slowly stalking towards her. The girl tripped over her own feet and backed away further before she shielded her face to avoid seeing her gruesome assumed fate. Driven by the desire to help, he quickly got to his feet and ran over to their position, dropping the items he had braved his greatest fear just to gain.

"Toothless!" He cried while running. The little Night Fury let loose a well-aimed plasma blast in between the two, earning a startled shriek from them both. The pair stood in front of the girl, ready to fight back if need be, or at least do what they could do.

What they weren't expecting however, was the docile look on the face of the Nadder. By all appearances, it looked confused, perhaps even curious, its pupils as wide and round as could be. It didn't seem like it had been threatening the child at all, and yet she still screamed for all she was worth. Hiccup turned to the girl and took but a few steps forward; if he could just get her to calm down then everyone could walk out of this no problem, he thought.

It seemed it would go all right as the Nadder took a few steps back when suddenly when an axe sailed through the air and lodged itself straight in the bird-dragon's skull. The Nadder shrieked in pain with spurts of blood gushing out of its skull, teetering about in pure agony. Hiccup was left utterly speechless when the foul-tasting sprays of blood had caught his face while watching the sudden turn of events.

Three burly Viking men covered in burns from beforehand battles soon came out of nowhere and dogpiled it to the ground instantly, tearing it limb from limb, punching its face, tying up its legs and wings. The Nadder continued to shriek all throughout the process â€“ where they were dragon swears only it could understand directed towards its enemies, cries of help to its allies in the sky, or simply animal-like shrieks of pain, the boy could not say.

Hiccup could hardly stand for the dragon to be tormented to death in this manner. "Toothless, stop them!" He cried.

Yet again, Toothless' blast had managed to break the scene apart. The Vikings pushed back to stare in angered awe at the boy, who know was only focusing on their victim. The Nadder was weak from the loss of blood, most of which had dripped over its snout, and several of its teeth knocked out from the Vikings' punches. Tied up completely in ropes and with multiple deep cuts and bruises that left its once beautiful scales ruined and cracked, it could no longer stand. A large cut was even present on its wing, effectively slicing the membrane in half â€“ the dragon would never fly again. A downed dragon is a dead dragon, he remembered Gobber saying, and it most certainly held true here. Even with its flight, this poor dragon was as good as dead. It weakly warbled right at him, just staring with nothing but the strongest despair present in its one good eye catching his.

"Oi, wha'd'ya think yer doin', boy! You shoudn't be out here!" One of the men cried. "An' wha's goin on here? Did tha' dragon do wha you told it ta do?"

Hiccup still stared at the injured Nadder, gulping down hard and taking in its now broken appearance. Shock coursed through him, his heart nearly stopped cold from the sight; pity and fear were also thereâ€¦ and something else too. His voice quivered and his mouth barely moved, but just beginning or trying to speak eventually helped him get his voice back. "W-Whyâ€¦ why did youâ€¦ do that?"

"Eh?" The Viking dumbly raised an eyebrow. Was this boy knocked on the head â€“ why ask a question that had the most obvious answer in the world? "Wha'cha think, boy; it was a dragon!"

He felt he should have been embarrassed for questioning something that had been common knowledge for centuries. It was just the way Vikings lived â€“ by killing dragons; it was how you got respect, it was how you proved your worth, and it was how you survived. But was this, what he just saw, really about survival? Beating this creature that hadn't done a thing wrong hardly seemed like some form of protection or defense of someone else. He wasn't stupid; placed in front of him as it was, even a child like him could see that.

"Thatâ€¦ what does that have to do with it? You hurt it just because of what it is? How is that fair?" He asked shakily.

"FAIR!? Tha' beast was about to kill tha' gurl!" A second man spoke in aggravation while pointing at the girl still down on the ground, huddled in fear. "You think it'd be fair if she went an' got killed!?"

"But it wasn't going to kill her!" Hiccup shouted.

"Yes, it was!" The girl spoke up from behind him, regaining some of her Viking-born defiance in a flash. "That dragon was totally vicious â€“ it looked ready to gobble me up in one bite. You saw it too, you idiot! Stop making stuff up to save it; that thing's nothing but a monster!" She screamed in anger pointing at the Nadder.

The boy's jaw dropped to the ground; she must have seen how

non-threatening the Nadder looked before he and Toothless stepped in. It was one thing to let fear have taken a hold of her, but it was clear she was just spouting lies to make herself seem innocent and falsely accuse the Nadder. The more he thought about it, the boy wondered how many other times this might have been the case. For some reason, he touched his face in thought, specifically his chin where a little scar that had long since healed was placed. Somewhere in his mind he could call back to a time when a dragon, some kind other than Toothless, had come before him. So gently, so peaceful, with a touch of warmness filling him when he heard a baby's giggling from somewhere in the background. The face of this unknown beast was the same kind on the Nadder now, the one the girl and the other Vikings were happily treating like an abomination of nature.

"You're the one making stuff up!" He shouted at her. "That Nadder hardly even touched you, and I bet it wasn't even going to at all!"

"Shut up!" She screamed back.

Hiccup glared at her â€“ even with the difference in appearance, black hair, hazel eyes, and little more than a tunic and some pants and boots, she seemed too familiar. The memory of Astrid came back and the connection became clear. They clearly shared similar rotten attitudes, ecstatic joy in dragon killing, and deception seemed to come easily enough to them both. Everything down to the same cold, agitated glare was similar between the two of them. The girl looked back to the other Vikings and pointed a stern finger to the Nadder's weary body. The look of pure disgust on her face made it seem like this creature that had her pinned down in fear mere moments ago was now reduced to the level of some insect. "Well, what are you waiting for, you jerks? Kill it, already, kill it, kill it!"

"All righ', lass, don't git yer undargarments in a twist." The first man darkly chuckled as he turned to the Nadder, widening its eye as much as it could in fear of the end. "Ah, a hero's work is nevur done, eh boys?"

"NO, STOP!" Hiccup cried.

The men paid no attention to his cries, instead drowning them out with bursts of laughter at the sight of the pathetic creature trying to scurry away. It was just so sad to them to see this demon squirming for its life; no, sickening â€“ it almost wasn't worth it. Yet still it came. They towered over the beast and one of them sunk his axe into the Nadder's remaining eye, gouging it out and effectively blinding it. The Nadder shrieked in pain once more, though the long, drawn out sound was shortened to a quick yelp when another one of them whacked it with his hammer. They pulled out any weapons they could and sunk them into the Nadders flesh, and even resorted to using their hands at times. They just continued to mutilate it, tear its boy appart, ripping its wings, yanking out its horns and spikes with the most gruesome sounds the boy had ever heard. The creature writhed and screamed until it could do so no more; too much blood was spilt, its lungs spent, the Nadder's head dropped down and remained there, unmoving, dead. Its carcass, now split apart into multiple bloodied pieces, was stepped upon by the Vikings, who wore the most wicked, toothy grins on their faces, a stance of dark victory.

"H-H-Ho-How c-could you?" The Vikings turned with groans of annoyance towards the traumatized boy, staring at what remained of the Nadder with eyes as wide as saucers. "I-It couldn't fly... it couldn't do anything to you, it was defenseless!"

"Defenseless? Are you daft, boy? What kinda defenseless creature goes and spits fire while messin' up OUR villages 'n swipin' OUR hard-earned food!?" The third man shouted in what sounded like some strange twist of amused anger. "They'r dragons, demons â€“ foul beasts that don't deserve to live! To kill a dragon is the greatest honor you'll evar know, an' tha best thing you can do fur yer people. We're the heroes around here â€“ killin' dragons, that's wha heroes do!"

Bowing his head down, grabbing the dried blades of grass under his hands and clenching them tightly, he gritted his teeth. The Vikings here, the ones on their island, the ones on Berk, they all thought the same it seemed. Killing dragons did indeed ignore the need to protect â€“ it was more than apparent now they did it simply for the thrill of it all. Everywhere he looked dragons were losing their lives for the sake of sport, to satisfy a brutish Viking's boredom. And to claim it protection in the end only added further mockery to their deaths. Now he knew, the identity of that unknown feeling inside him, bubbling up until it was ready to erupt out â€“ it was anger. Toothless had that same anger fueling him, yet it was all he could do to hold on to his sanity and channeling it into protecting the stunned boy behind him.

The Vikings looked down on the dragon and thin boy with nothing but hat same disgust that went into their sight of the Nadder. Their forms approached and hovered over them like cold stone statues ready to slam down on them, just like the fiery giant in Hiccup's dreams from some time ago. "Oy, wha's this beast doin? It can't be protectin' tha boy!" One of them said.

"Ridiculous, this stupid thing doesan't know tha' meanin' o tha wurd!" Another shouted.

"Ay, true, a dragon's too dumb to undarstand anythin' us humans say." The third one chuckled, throwing them all into a fit of mocking laughter. Toothless growled even louder, but sunk his claws into the dirt to keep himself from launching towards what might be his own death.

"Oy, ya know, don' think I've seen a beast quite like tha' oneâ€¦" The first one mused. "Think it might be a new dragonâ€¦"

"Huh, can't say ah've seen its like myself." The third one spoke. "Ah bet it's a rare one. Its head'll look good on my wall."

"Ah, come on!" The first one shouted. "Look at tha size of it. Too young, ah'd say!"

"Who cares? A kill's a kill, and the rarer, tha better." The second one spoke, and like a starting signal they all started stalking towards Toothless. The Night Fury refused to show any fear, give them any kind of satisfaction; he just continued to growl back at them, warning them to stay away. He knew he wasn't all that powerful, but he could at least deal them a considerable amount of damage. If they so much as laid one finger on Hiccup, Toothless swore he would rip

them apart as they did to that Nadder. But before the lead one could swing his axe down and their little brawl could commence, a voice sounded from behind.

"This is honor to you?" Said the once trembling, once miserable boy of two years from behind the dragon. The sheer ferocity and rage in his tone had managed to catch everyone's attention. "This is protecting? You tortured that dragon to death and you think that makes you a hero!?"

The Vikings stood in shock for a moment before recomposing themselves and sneering grimly. "Don't tell me yur sympathizing with these things, boy?" The lead one said.

"Seems like it based on that beast he's got hoverin' around him." One of the others said.

"What is wrong with you!?" The girl cried from behind him once more "Are you sick in the head, you little twerp? Those monsters need to die, every last one of them!" The girl cried. Hiccup turned his now furious glare over to her, and she actually flinched a bit before scoffing and looking away, as if she had now lost all interest in the matter.

The Vikings seized the moment to catch Hiccup's guard dragon off guard by launching a sneak attack. Seizing a burning plank from a nearby house, he threw it in front of the dragon and prepared to swing as it backed away. Hiccup started screaming as the torch rolled toward him and scurried away to a distance where he was far enough from the flames yet still close enough to help Toothless. In his horror and rage over the Nadder's demise, he had actually forgotten he was in the middle of a village that was currently burning to the ground. The Vikings could only burst into condescending laughter seeing the gutsy little dragon defender scramble away like a rat.

"Wha's the mattar, boy?" They laughed. "Can't take tha heat? Ya hang aroun' with these filthy vermin, you shuld be used to a lit'l fire."

"Heh, just look at 'im, nuthin' but a worthless lit'l runt. Obviously start'd hanging out with dragons 'cause we real warriors were too good fer him. Is tha' it, boy?" The third one asked in a tone more arrogant than any he heard before, even from the likes of the vile Jorgensons. He came forward and grabbed Hiccup by his throat, shoving his face up to observe his overly smug look. "Bet'cha got kicked outta yer own tribe 'cause they got sick 'o dealin' with a weaklin' like you. Must hurt knowin' you'd nevar be anythin' more than a disgrace?"

Toothless charged forward as quickly as he could with his teeth extended as far out as they could go. He rushed at full speed, yet he could hardly wait to sink his teeth into this despicable human's neck. He leaped into the air and readied to his first blow to be the killing one. When out of the blue, the axe of one of the other men swiped out and managed to cut him, a harsh injury dealt right to his neck. The Night Fury slammed into the wall and slid down, a pool of blood collecting beneath his still form.

"TOOTHLESS, NO!" Hiccup cried. He reached out in worry to his friend

only for the Viking in front of him to let go of his head and deliver a heavy punch right to his cheek. It felt like a chunk of stone had been hurled right at his face â€“ it was a miracle his teeth were still intact. The force actually sent him flying a small ways towards Toothless. Cracking his eyes open, he could still hear the faint inhalation coming from his nostrils, shaky but still there.

"Sidin' with the dragons was the biggest mistake you culd evar make, boy. And by Thor's hammar, you bettar believe it'll be yur last." He turned to the men behind him. "Let the chief know abou' this lit'l heathen and prepare the blood eagle â€“ only fitting punishments for such traitors."

The Blood Eagle was perhaps the most capital punishment any criminal of Viking society could ever receive. Cutting the skin by the spine, breaking the ribs so they resembled blood-stained wings, and pulling the lungs out through the victim's back all sounded like too much to Hiccup. He didn't think even the lowest form of life in the world deserved such a terrifying execution and yet this was the fate these savages had chosen for him, a child of nine winters.

He should have realized it, he thought, accepted it for what it was the night his own uncle, his family, tried to end his life so cruelly as to abandon him and leave him to fearfully await the end. He should have, but he was too forgiving, and pushed it away. He didn't want to feel anything about it, wanted so desperately to run away from these feelings so foreign to him towards those monumental atrocities, or what he'd like to think was so. But it seemed now the truth just decided to grab his head and force him to face it entirely, a truth so bad not even the good in life could hope to balance it out.

Hiccup backed away, looking from the approaching Vikings to the girl who had already run away and left him to his fate. He struggled to stay awake, hearing nothing but the flames that still burned, quickening his pulse and threatening to suffocate him. Who could guess where these Vikings found all these inventive ways to make their enemies suffer? He just wanted it to be over with, if this truly was the endâ€¦

He was shook awake once more when the quick jolting sound of Toothless's plasma blast striking one of the men in the chest, blowing him back and killing him instantly. Toothless leaped onto the second man and slashed all over his chest, then leaped over and slapped the third Viking in the face with his tail before jumping back over to Hiccup. He noticed immediately how heavily Toothless was breathing due to the large cut in his throat and it bothered him greatly. But with the two Vikings quickly approaching them, he hardly had the time for it. Hiccup hopped on the Night Fury's back and away they flew into the night, camouflaging perfectly against the darkness. Breathing heavily, he could still hear their enraged voices calling out.

"TRAITOR!"

"DEMON LOVER!"

"The gods will punish you one day boy! Only the just live long!"

Hiccup gritted his teeth and balled his hands on Toothless' scales, the action keeping the dragon alert. He could no longer ignore or deny it, not when it had now been shoved into his face. Today they had killed a dragon and were ready to kill a boy for showing compassion to it, tomorrow they would kill ten more dragons to make up for a lousy night. They were ready to slaughter living creatures, and they would see goodness alone in it. Well, now he was fully convinced, he saw what was real. With only one good eye, he thought as he absentmindedly clutched the bandages hiding his scar.

Humans, Vikings, were pure evil.

* * *

><p>Well, this was dark. But hey, dark is good.

Now Hiccup has come to a great turning point in his development in that he has a firm belief. Remember, this chapter and the chapters that remain in this arc are here to set up his character in the rest of the story. He might seem a bit OOC, but hey, AU, so it counts.

I am alternating between stories right now, so expect the next chapter to come some time after the new chapter for The New Life is posted. Be sure to check that out, too.

As always, review, favorite, follow. Keep it coming, this story's really building up and who knows where we'll be by the end? Till next time!

12. Chapter 12

Alright, I'm glad I could get this chapter out a lot sooner than I expected to. I was just motivated by some additional news for the third season of 'Dragons' and the fact that I'm now up to 400+ follows!

You can look back to the latest chapter of 'TNLfaH' to see all the initial information I found on the third season. I recommend you check that out first before reading all of this; well, it's not really required, but it's still a good idea. If you've already seen the preview then you know all this, but I'm just letting you all in on some additional details regarding what we might see in 'Race to the Edge,' specifically, some of the new dragons. Here they are, with abilities and all.

The Deathsong: An exotic-colored dragon appears similar to a Timberjack. It lures its prey in with a siren-like song before coating its prey in an amber substance and finishing it off.

Catastrophic Quake: A Boulder-class dragon that can curl up and roll like a boulder, crashing into enemies as a form of attack and defense. It is similar to a Gronkle and Hotburple in terms of body shape.

**Cavern Crasher: This dragon doesn't have an appearance just yet, but it has been stated that this dragon has the ability to squeeze

its body flat to fit through small spaces.**

Night Terrors: These dragons are extremely miniscule, but they fly together in large packs and stay closely together in order to take the form of much larger and more terrifying dragons for protection.

Snow Wraith: A pure white dragon that is reported to have infrared vision, enabling it to see during harsh blizzards.

Aside from all these new species of dragons, there is also news about the Dragon's Eye. The very important artifact that Hiccup will use in the series. When Toothless shines his plasma through it, it acts as a navigation device that leads the riders to uncharted lands, where they will find these extremely rare species of dragons. Because of this, the Dragon's Eye is very valuable to the villains of this season, a group of unknown dragon trappers that will stop at nothing to get it.

Another thing to note from the preview is that the riders seem to have set up headquarters at an island that does not appear to be Berk. In terms of geography, I would say it's a bit similar to the New Birth Island seen in 'Gift of the Night Fury,' where the dragons migrate to in order to have their babies. There appears to be a whole clubhouse-paradise thing going on there. It looks very interesting. I for one cannot wait for this new season!

**Now, back to the new chapter. Now I know I said we weren't going to visit Berk for a while, but I ended up thinking that Berk needed a bit of setup for where I was going to take it in the second arc. I am still sticking to what I said, or mostly said, is that everything from here on out would be setup for what happens onward. **

I warn you now, there will be gore in this chapter. Read at your own risk.

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The days seemed to be colder in recent times, colder than wool furs and thickened skin could guard against, leaving those who suffered to hug themselves as they walked along the constant snow covered streets. The sun never shined anymore, save for the slight glint it could get every now and again from in between the heavy rainclouds that hovered over the island. There for only a second, and then swallowed up to cast the land and sea into a shade nearly as dark as night, even in the midday hours. It was a sign that devastating winter was well upon the isle. Though now in its prelude stages, the inhabitants nonetheless trudged through their daily task preparing themselves for the deadly chills of the unforgiving blizzards to come.

Such were the days on the Isle of Berk.

In the village plaza, the marketplace was in full swing, with women operating their stalls and managing their stocks of salted fish and wild game. Men hefted their planks of wood to batten down their barns, huts, and the food storage, all stocked by what sparse amounts they could gather. The last few boats sent out in the earlier hours were beginning to sail back in with the fishermen's feeble catches,

nets half-filled at best given such tempestuous waters. All the barrels of milk and boxes of eggs the animals could produce were delivered as well while the animals themselves were shut inside their barns and the Great Hall. The younger helped by gathering wood from the edge of the forest or from boats deemed unfit to sail to burn in their fireplaces, building up their supply before the blizzards could settle in. They had been sure to hurry before the falling snow touched the wood and it became too wet for use.

In fact, everyone out and about was moving at a rushed pace to gather every bit of supplies they needed for the long days they would huddle in their homes and wait out the storm. The sales women bartered with fervent impatience to others for their linens and blankets. The men barked orders a little louder and trudged towards their designated spaces a little faster.

But Vikings in a crabby mood today wouldn't really be a strange sight compared to any other day. Every day was the same as the last, whether it got a little colder or not.

What would have seemed strange, wrong even, from the eye of any vagabond who knew the tragic story of who had happened to the boy they once called 'heir' that life could continue at such an even pace. Indeed, life on Berk on the surface was as it always been, without even the slightest hint of dejection in the residents. Two years since his death in that burning hut had been more than enough time to grieve for the tiny nuisance who did little besides give their lives unnecessary difficulty. He got a nice sendoff, more so than most around thought he really deserved actually. Few really mourned at all, and two years later, fewer still bothered to remember.

Such was the tragic fate of Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, abused in life and neglected in death. Gone before he could earn his title and place in Viking society, even before he wielded his first weapon. And all that truly bothered the people of Berk regarding this was what had resulted from it in terms of their beloved chief.

Stoick the Vast, once and arguably still mighty chieftain of Berk, had been reduced to a broken man condemning himself to his own hut and did little but weep over the memory of his broken family. As time moved on with the rest of the village, inside his house it remained frozen in a tragic moment. Those who dared to peek inside his lonely abode would only see a giant husk sitting in his bear-skinned chair by the fireplace, a mug emptied of mead who knows how many times, eyes red with long-since dried tears and newly formed ones, along with the embers of the hearth stinging at him. In his lap he would carry a Viking helmet, the one his beloved Valka had once owned and that he would give to Hiccup once he had come of age and shaped up as a proper Viking. Now it was only a cold iron memento of two lost pasts and futures, doomed to sit on a shelf and gather dust.

For two long years he remained in that sorry state, not even coming to chiefly meetings and give orders, or even to give his daily rounds. And since the decision to hole himself away was made, Berk's economy had been slowly declining. Arguments between the people occurred far more often: disputes over farmland, distribution of goods, usage and fees for boats and equipment, angered demands for weapon repair and replacement, and even simple domestic squabbles could go on for hours without his diplomatic council to reach a

resolution. It had become impossible for any kind of progress to be made unless someone took charge.

That was where Spitelout came in. As Stoick's second in command, he was almost unanimously accepted by the people to serve as the acting chief in his brother's absence. Spitelout turned out to be much more cunning than anyone gave him credit for, requiring only a few short months before he had managed to return a sense of stability to Berk. His hard work combined with his charismatic persona had allowed him to gain much favor amongst the villagers. Nowadays there wasn't a single street that could be passed without hearing praise for the Jorgenson clan head in gossip.

And as pleasing as it was to his ears, Spitelout carried on down the street today in a mood that was clearly all business. He carried a bundle of rolled up papers underneath his arm, taking heavy steps up the hill towards his brother's gloomy abode. His face was set in the empty, grumpy demeanor it had always been so as not to insinuate that he was distracted by their compliments, not that it would've have been frowned upon.

At least not to the majority of the common folk like the lesser clans, but for those who supported the Haddock clan, like the old, peg-legged smith that leaned against a nearby rock jutting from the hill, it was another story. Some would call it bitter jealousy formed over a position of power or mere constant difference of opinion, but none could deny the fierce animosity between them that only increased tenfold since Hiccup's death.

"Taking a leisurely stroll, Spitelout?" The Jorgenson turned to see Gobber with his arms folded with a deadpan look of pure suspicion etched all over him. "Weather's hardly appropriate, don'cha think?"

"I'm here ta discuss mattars with Stoick. Nothin a smithy needs ta concern himself with." Spitelout said pausing in his walk to turn to Gobber.

"Stoick's not much fer talkin nowadays, if you'll recall."

"Or giving orders."

"That's yer job, as the acting chief. A position you were as thrilled as a boar in slop ta get, ah remember." Although Gobber could admit, even if boars could smile at all, they wouldn't give grins nearly as crooked as Spitelout's the day the elders had given him the position. Add to that the obvious fact that the entire Jorgenson clan was a lot chipper in recent memory since his little ascension to temporary monarchy.

"Someone had ta take charge, and as Stoick's second in command, I was the most qualified. But even I can't know what to do with people running around like headless chickens!"

"They're just as loud, I'd say." He scoffed. Vikings somehow found a way to complain about everything.

"And jokes hardly help the situation we now face." Spitelout shot along with an icy glare.

Gobber was hardly intimidated, though. "Don't knock em till ya try em. Might get ya ta finally crack a smile fer once in yer life."

"Is smilin' going to help our people survive the winter?" Spitelout growled in exasperation. "Will it fill our storages? Or give food to the starving? Or maybe you're thinkin it'll magically hold back the blizzard and let the sun shine down?"

"Yeesh, well aren' you just a ray 'o sunshine yerself?"

The acting chief pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed heavily in annoyance. "Listen, Gobber. Raid after raid has dealt heavy blow to our morale, and the villagers are becoming ratherâ€¦ pessimistic, if not angry. A bad way to be in with the next dragon attack always right around the corner. And the elders and clan heads prefer to discuss who to blame over what to do about it all. With our tribe's future up in the air, right now what Berk needs most is direction."

Gobber was thankfully silent for a moment, musing in thought with his hook on his lip before he moved away from the rock. "Whada'ya know, there is something we can agree on. Still, don' count on getting through ta Stoick."

"He's the chief - he doesn't get the luxury of sittin around and wastin away over a dead child."

"_His_ dead child." Spitelout was beginning to tread on very thin ice now.

"It's been two years, Gobber. People have to move on eventually."

"It's one thing ta move on, it's anothar to go and forget the boy entirely!"

"Perhaps forgetting is simply how people choose to move on." Gobber gave an indignant scowl and a flash of gritted teeth at Spitelout's words of innocence. "My brother is not the first to grieve over the loss of a loved one, nor is it his first time grieving. What might seem callous to you may simply be Berk's kindness towards its suffering leader. Why torment him further with the reality of it by speaking his name?"

"You've got a heart o' gold, Spitelout. Any more sympathy and you'll start bleedin' from the inside out."

Catching the overwhelming hint of fraudulence in Spitelout's saddened expression then turned out to be more of a challenge than Gobber first thought. "Look, the boy was my family too. And what happened to him, to me, was a deep, personal loss...

"I find tha quite hard to believeâ€¦"

"I mourned as anyone else didâ€¦"

"Fer a good two days!" He barked. "Ah'll admit though, you gave quite a good show in that time."

"Think of it what you will, but the fact is that Midgard will not

stop to mourn with me, us. Time and memory move in opposite directions, something my brother needs to be reminded of. Rather than look back to what was lost, we must turn to what remains and move forward, as we always have."

Gobber paused in confusion for just a minute before his eyes widened in shocked outrage. "So tha's wha' this is about... Gods, Spitelout, ah knew yew ware relentless, bu' this!"

Having sensed that the smith had him at point with that battleaxe of skepticism, Spitelout let the pained face fall and decided to drop the act. As the little nuisance's mentor in blacksmithing, Gobber had a strong connection to him, and always assumed he had known more about the entire incident than he let on. Spitelout was fortunate in that most of the village, including his accomplices that night, quickly took to his defense in trying to dissuade the smith's crazy suspicions. Because of that, Gobber was now stuck in a less than favorable position among the villagers, yet Spitelout still found he could barely make a move without this overgrown thorn in his side looking over his shoulder.

"What pains Stoick most is not the memory, but how to carry it and what to do now. It was the same as with Valka. No one can argue that for a warrior and a chief, that inability is true suffering." He argued with a cold scowl, intent on removing that thorn.

"Pushin' for Snotlout ta be chief now!" Gobber barked.

"He lost one option â€“ doesn't mean he's out of them."

"You'd have him throw away the dream of the future he had for Berk!?"

"That future was already lost the moment the boy perished. As I stated before, what Berk needs is directionâ€¦" A shady glint in Spitelout's eyes was just barely captured by Gobber's keen gaze. "And I can offer it."

"Oh, really. An' I sappose yew'll expect a big party wit' a feast afterwards. Nothin less for tha big hero of Berk! Tell me, though, is that gonna be yur son, or you!?"

"Hmph. Everything I doâ€¦ is for Berk's benefit." Spitelout said before marching up once more to the Haddock Hall, with Gobber following much to his chagrin.

The Haddock household had been as it had always been, spacious and grand, with its large wooden walls lined with cupboards and shelves filled with knickknacks and weapons. The same giant barrels of mead were right by the dining table, with a long staircase leading up to a second level next to it. Sacks of spices and jams along with piles of kindling and tattered clothes laid along the floor, along with a giant skin rug. The same hearth with the old cooking pot right above it was placed at the center of the room, illuminating the rather ghastly-looking dragon and animal heads from a terrifying angle. A bit cluttered and somewhat luxurious compared to others, but it still possessed a quaint charm all its own.

Or it would have been save for that cold feeling that permeated the enclosed air in there. One of the rooms upstairs that no longer

possessed an owner, a place at the table that seated only emty air, small training weapons that would never belong to anyone. The emptiness that surrounded and engulfed that entire house came from the simple fact that something was missing from it.

Spitelout completely disregarded any sense of all this and simply marched up to the only arguable living thing in the center of the room. As always, his brother Stoick sat in his bear-skin throne, saddled further with his cape underneath him. The light of the fire illuminated his feature enough to show that both his skin and hair had gained a considerable shade of white in the time he had locked himself in his hut. His entire form sat slumped along the back of the chair, a glazed look in his vacant scare directed right and the glowing flame, replaying that tragic night in between the flickers and cracks. His chair almost entirely turned away from him, Spitelout nonetheless spoke.

"Listen here, brother, you've put this off long enough."

"â€¦Leave me in peaceâ€¦" Stoick absentmindedly drawled. The scent of his voice thick with Thor knew how many sleepless nights of alcohol.

"I've left you to yer peace fer two long years. The village needs a decision now on who will be made the new heir. I cannot make that decision for them."

"Just spare us, Spitelout, modesty doesn't work for ya!" Shouted a beet-red Gobber from the entrance. He trudged right in and yanked the Jorgenson by the shoulder to take his full attention. Few things could ever really set his tested temper aflame, but now he clearly gave a feel of outrage only the Jorgenson and his imaginary Boneknapper could summon. It looked as if it took all his self-control not to gouge his eye out with that hook. "S'already set in stone, why bother getting' approval fer it!?"

"I'm merely giving him another option."

"The only option, you mean!"

"Reason enough ta go through with it." Spitelout smirked in victory.

"Valhalla almighty, ah'd swear yew struck a deal with the Trickster 'imself! This all couldn'ta worked out better for ya, could it? Hiccup's nuthin but a pile o' ashes, and now your son is next in line ta be chief!"

Spitelout let the smirk fall and looked back to his disheveled brother still slumped in his chair. The man had made no apparent sign that he had paid attention; he remained there as he had always been, completely dead to the world. He'd managed to scrape together some semblance of sympathy from the corners of his psyche and fix them on his gaze, though Odin only knew how he'd managed even that, before he faced the smith again. "Gobber, have you no sense of tact?"

"Hello, I'm a Viking! Tact's not really in our mental dictionary!"

"As I've reminded Stoick many times before, Snotlout was the

firstborn heir before his boy came along. And none of us were sure he'd even survive anyway! So it happened a little later than expected, he still had a good run!"

"Now look who's got a fat mouth!" Gobber gestured.

Spitelout ignored him and turned to grab Stoick's seat by the arms and force the man's dazed attention onto him. "Listen here, brother. I ask you now, do you fully intend to give up on this tribe and let it fall prey to the dragons while you sit here drowning your duties along with your sorrows? It is you that the people look to, and yet here you are slouching in that easy chair waiting for those demons to burn us all to death. Like they did your child!"

"Spitelout, that's enough!"

"All your valor and for what? All to let those beasts burn it all away? Is the loss of your wife and boy enough to make you crumble? Will this pathetic weakness invite them to take more from us!?"

"â€¦What does it mattar nowâ€¦?" Stoick mumbled, although the way his white knuckled hands gripped onto the seat said otherwise.

"â€¦Huh, so this is what the great chief of Berk has been reduced toâ€¦. Disgracefulâ€¦" Spitelout shook his head. He'd figured one weak Haddock was enough, and he had gone to such length and taken such risks to snuff out that weakness. Only to now be made to practically dote over what may have been akin to a living corpse. It was sickening, having to show compassion and empathy in such a manner, essentially tossing his own Viking pride and warriorhood into the air. It almost didn't seem worth it all. "Might as well have gone an' died yerself, spare ya this shame an' quite literally put you out o' yer miseryâ€¦"

That was the clincher for the immediately beforehand mournful chief, recalling to the moment a certain Viking to be had said something similar. Parenthood had been something difficult for him, made all the more frustrating by a difficult offspring he had no kind of connection or similarities to. He could freely confess that he could have taken many different roads, or perhaps simply not always relying on a fallback strategy of speaking to him in a chiefly persona when fatherly instincts were lost.

But never did he think their bumpy relationship of forced changes and dismissed desires and opinions would come to end in the form of a single devastating question. The culmination of his years of apparent deprivation of any kind of love or familial bonds only appropriately able to be said moments before his untimely demise, blunt enough without any kind of backwards interpretation.

How would Valka have handled the situation, he wondered? Surely his long deceased wife, who held a compassion for apparently all creatures great and small would have been able to reach an understanding with their child more. If he had struggled, he might have been able to draw on her spirit and give Hiccup the gentle, domestic touch he might have responded better to. Their child, born with almost nothing, deserved as much; after all, Hiccup was not as blessed as he was in having memories of her to hold onto. How selfish he had been to the boy whose entire life and legacy was nothing but a

series of mistakes echoing his own name. Never had any thought made him feel like far less of the great figure of righteousness he and others viewed him as, that he would leave Hiccup wishing for the comfort of some faceless specter alone in his room. All because he didn't want to resign himself to the menial chore of raising such an insufferable child and resigning himself to be a mother as well.

Not like it mattered, not anymore; for Hiccup and Valka both, who met their ends at the claws of the dragons. Every imaginative road he traversed in his mind led to that same inevitable dead end. Wonderings of Hiccup, Valka, what-if-they-were-still-here and how-things-could-have-been all stopped with a veritable wall of flames. He'd look above and there would be those foul beasts circling above, dragging them off to the darkest pits of Hel.

He was left alone, swallowed whole by the shadows of tragedyâ€¦ all because of them. Theyâ€¦ those demonsâ€¦ took his family away from him.

His heart was caught in a vice-like grip, boiling like volcanic magma rising and bubbling. The stygian void of his soul suddenly began to flare to life once more, a red-hot glow pulsing from deep within. His fists began to grip the arms of his chair harder and harder until the wood actually began to splinter and break. Every ambient sound drowned out and faded away into nothing as a torrent of roars resounded inside, telling him to break apart and destroy. This overwhelming rage inside threatening to break apart his very sanity right now needed to be channeled in some way.

Gobber and Spitelout both hardly paid any attention with all their bickering until the moment Stoick rose from his seat. The chief seemed to be in some manner of bloodthirsty trance from the way his bulk slouched over, his massive tree-trunk arms hung down limply. The two paused and stared in shock at him as he reached for his old, worn battle axe from the shelf and trudged out the door.

"Eh, was it sumthin' we said?" Gobber asked.

For a man who had only just awoken from two years of non-stop despair and mourning, Stoick turned out to be much lighter on his feet than either Gobber or Spitelout had expected. Less than a few moments after he had walked out the door with his weapon in hand, he had already made it to the Kill Ring. The arena was hardly in use considering the preparations that everyone else had been making; other than some random person coming in to feed the caged dragons in the arena it was practically deserted all the time.

By the time the two of them had gotten there, they had found Stoick right in the center of the arena, with a number of Vikings already crowded around the edges. The lightly falling snow covered down and splotched their fur clothing and the metal spiked armor they wore with the slightest hint of white on their darkened forms. The dramatic drops in temperature didn't seem to bother them one bit what with the burning sensation that seemed to be pulsing out from within the arena. Though only one man stood inside, it felt like a collection of heartbeats, a loud thumping, a massive heat that could put the fires of Muspelhelm to eternal shame.

"Wha' tha hel's he up to? Ah, hey!" Gobber cried. At then he noticed five other men lifting up the seals on the cages that held the

dragons. "Whad'ya think yer doin?"

"Stoick's orders! He wants ta fight all of the dragons a' once!" One of them called.

Gobber blinked so hard in disbelief it felt like a hammer had smacked him atop his head. He rushed to the bars of the cage and just stared at his old friend with utter shock slapped onto his expression, unable to even utter the questions ricocheting off the walls of his head in any coherent way. Was this it â€“ had Stoick finally gone mad with his despair over the loss of his family? Was he here looking for one last thrill of battle before he called it quits on life?

One by one the logs sealing the doors of each cage were unlocked, revealing their contents: a teal and red Deadly Nadder, an orange Zippleback with brown spots, a green Monstrous Nightmare, a Terrible Terror colored purple, and a red Gronkle. It was a ravenous rainbow of dragons ready to snap out at any one who dared challenge them. The Nadder bounced around swinging and flailing its tail wildly releasing its spines in every direction it could. The Nightmare and Terror were scaling the walls firing their breaths and lunging out with their razor-sharp fangs at anyone who was close enough; some Vikings tried to deliver a good punch or swipe their own weapons at them but only got away with a good curse or two thanks to their agility. The Gronkle stomped down on the ground once or twice before beating its tiny wings to bring its bloated body airborne, and the Zippleback swung its heads around emitting gas that flooded the whole arena.

It was clear that all of these dragons had gone completely mad as a result of their imprisonment, and now that they were free there was no telling what these animals were capable of. Yet to their equally ravenous audience above it all just made for a better show, to see if their animalistic carnage could match up to their true honor. The fun, to the Vikings, was in how the beasts thought they stood a chance, and the punishing answer that always awaited them in the end no matter how much they resisted made it laughable entertainment.

But to the opponents down there today, it was no matter of fun, or joy, or glory, or righteousness â€“ there was only the battle and who would survive. That became clear in the moment every pair of dragon eyes locked on to the grim form of the chief that stood before them, the man directly responsible for their being caged. His face was completely hidden by shadow, his body hunched over, seeming a bit unsteady on his feet. Combined with his rapidly aged appearance, he looked more like he was ready to keel over and take the journey to Valhalla right then and there. Some of the rational ones amongst the crowd actually feared he might not have been prepared as he might have thought when he gave the command to fight.

"Stoick, have ya gone daft!? Don't do this!" Gobber cried. But his pleadings to his old friend fell on deaf ears.

All at once, the dragons charged in, poised to kill and shred to bloody pieces. They rushed with terrifying speed, roaring and chirping and barking out loud, coming in as steady as they could with whatever grip on their bearings they had. But for whatever reason â€“ their lack of focus or a sudden, similar bust of agility from the chief â€“ they all completely missed Stoick. They rushed right past him, skidding to a stop at the barred entrance to the Ring. To the

spectators, it almost looked for a moment as if they might have passed through Stoick.

Like he had been a ghost.

One by one the dragons came charging in again, and this time, Stoick reacted. Turning around, they could see he was heavily breathing through his nostrils, totally fuming. IT might have explained why there was almost no snow on him, aside from how the caged ceiling was blocking most of the flakes from reaching him, that he felt a level of fury hot enough to melt them away. The breathing escalated in volume and speed, all building up to the single loudest, most form-shaking, most terrifying war cry anyone, dragon or human, in this realm or any of the other eight, had ever heard or could hear:

"RRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

Taking advantage of the stunned dragons, Stoick rushed in, and what happened in those next few moments went beyond anyone's comprehension. He went for the Gronkle first, and he swung his axe with ten times his normal strength. The blade sunk right into the Gronkle's side, slamming it down onto the cold stone floor, the impact hard enough to make it bounce up like a ball. Stoick took another swing with his axe and knocked it back towards the cage doors; its body hit the steel doorway with a sickening crunch of its bones.

The chief marched up and without any warning began to rapidly and continuously hack away at its body. Each of the bumps on its body were sliced open and eventually its flesh parted way to the muscles underneath. Cascades of blood flowed through the air with each swing, but they eventually died down as Stoick made his way to the Boulder dragon's bones, cracking and shattering them to pieces. He had hardly noticed how the Gronkle had long since stopped with each heavy cry as he cut deeper and deeper â€“ it had died mere seconds ago and still he continued.

The dragons were stunned in horror for mere seconds before they recuperated and returned to their angered states. The Nadder was the first to launch a counterattack, hopping forward and spinning on its heel to deliver a volley of spine shots. Many people cried out in fear for their chief, who was still facing the now dead Gronkle. Their surprise could hardly be described though when Stoick carelessly tossed the Gronkle's carcass and flung it in the air, its form catching each and every one of the shots in less damaged areas that burst with blood and flopping back onto the ground with a cold thud.

That Nadder became his next target, planting his axe right into the Nadder's snout, landing a perfect blow and splitting its snout wide open with a shriek of pain and a fountain of blood coming from the dragon. Yanking on the handle, he launched himself up to its back, pulling his axe with him, sliding it out of the Nadder's severed muzzle and landing straight on its shoulder blades. With two mighty swings he chopped both its wings off, earning another shriek as the wings fell limply to the ground spilling out blood by the barrels.

Stoick then grabbed onto its neck and wrestled it down to the ground,

grabbing and yanking out two of the spine frills on its head and driving them straight into its neck, ripping its flesh open before proceeding to stab the muscles and organs in its neck. He spread out the two spines in his hand and let their sharp points rip its guts in half, dragging them around the radius. The Nadder coughed and chocked and spit out spurt after spurt of blood before it finally collapsed to the ground dead.

The Nightmare was up now, made clear from how Stoick turned to face it. Going back to take the Gronkle by its bludgeon-like tail, he swung the dead beast around before it collided with the form of the Nightmare. Where at one moment the beast was poised for attack, readying a stream of fire inside its jaws, the next it had been knocked back against the arena wall. Before the Stoker-class had a chance to react, Stoick hopped atop the Gronkle's back and swung his axe directly into the Nightmare's right eye. It exploded in a burst of blood and the Nightmare roared in agony, knocking Stoick and the Gronkle away.

The chief landed on his feet with a skid and let the rain of blood spill down on him, watching and delighting as the Nightmare spasmed and writhed on the ground. In its miserable daze, it locked in on Stoick and unleashed a jet of fire, which Stoick dodged promptly. It followed up by coating its entire body on fire and heading straight for Stoick, its talons poised ready to rip the beastly human in front of it apart. Its hopes were shot as the chief launched into the air and came down with an immediate right hook counter to its snout, putting out its fire and sending it rolling onto the ground.

He rushed up again and reveled further in hacking its stomach open and yanking its heart right out of its chest, along with a multitude of several other stringy, sticky internal organs that came with it or were splattered down to the ground. He squeezed the still beating heart in his hand, feeling as it convulsed quicker with each passing second. The Nightmare in turn, seemed to be breathing so rapidly it seemed to be choking, staring with its one remaining eye so wide at him, just waitingâ€¦ and waitingâ€¦ and waiting.

Until it ended, the heart could not handle the pressure and was crushed in an explosion of dragon blood within Stoick's iron grip. The Nightmare collapsed the instant its heart went and flopped lifelessly onto the ground.

The last remaining dragons, the Terror and Zippleback, began to grow scared. The Zippleback reacted in panic and charged in with both its heads ready to take Stoick out. The left head emitted its gas while the other clicked its teeth for the spark that would ignite the noxious fumes. Mere inches away from Stoick, the gas ignited, resulting in a large explosion throughout the blood-stained arena floor. Much of the gas had remained though, leaving the scene obscured to the watching Vikings above. The two heads of the Zippleback peered through the smog in the hopes of finding the blackened dead form of their enemy on the ground, but were shocked to find nothing but charred stone.

It looked all over, scanning its own veil of smoke to track their still-living enemy. Suddenly its greatest weapon was turned against it as it all seemed to close in on it, feeling more trapped than ever before. The heads uttered frightened growls mixed in with occasional whimpers, waiting and waitingâ€¦ for who knew what.

A pair of cold hands suddenly grabbed them by their necks and yanked them down to stare at the dead, hateful eyes of Stoick the Vast. He tied their heads together with all the practiced ease of tying the ropes of ships to the docks. The two heads gasped and choked for precious air as the explosive gases in its system seemed to build up. Unable to release the just kept rising from within, both heads convulsing with sprays and sparks. The surrounding fog had now dissipated to give the crowd a clear view of this â€“ the Zippleback dying as a result of its own ability. Still the gases continued to build with no way to release, more and more, until the final limit had been reached. The two heads exploded in a gaseous detonation of fire, its two necks dropping down along with the rest of its now lifeless body. To punish it further, Stoick grabbed his axe and severed both of its necks before turning away.

All that remained now was the Terror, who after watching each of its dragon allies meet a grotesque end at the hands of this one man was in no condition to fight. It just stared with eyes filled with terror, unable to growl or even let out a single puff of fire. It just pushed itself back and closed in on itself, making little begging whimpers for its life to be spared. Stoick just stared with empty rage and disgust at the sight of the pathetic creature; for a second he didn't even find it worth killing. That was as close to remorse as the vengeful chief could now be.

The crowd of Vikings above had stopped their cheers long ago, allowing this massacre to continue on in silence save for the dragons final screams of misery before their deaths. Now, there was almost nothing; the world had become almost completely muted, save for the whimpers of the one remaining. The color had drained away and everything seemed to gray out, save for the deep crimson that coated Stoick from head to toe that turned nearly black in its multitudes. They only stared with mouths agape and the slightest twinges of fear, as Stoick grabbed the tiny little helspawn by its head and held its frightened form for them all to see.

"Hear me, warriors of Berk and Valhalla alike! I call to you now, brothers in arms!"

That cry from their chief snapped them all back to their full attention with winces all around. They all looked down to Stoick as he spoke again, with obedience and a slight twinge ofâ€¦ fear.

"The ground we stand upon has seen centuries' worth of bloodshed, our way of life threatened to be undone by the devils that plague our skies! Countless noble souls, and innocent lives sacrificed, all to appease the gluttony of these monsters! How many wives have been forced to bury their children? How many men seen their brothers turned to ash before their very eyes?"

As if his words had broken away some powerful spell, the Vikings began to return to their normal states of raucous brutality. They began to growl and yell, grab on to the bars of the cage and pump their fists in the air, and all stare down angrily at the Terror. No one felt a single hint of pity for the still whimpering dragon looking into each of their faces and seeing only the pouring hate in each one. That despicable little lizard would get nothing less than the full villain treatment here, and it would suffer in its final moments with this solitude.

"I say now, no more! The time has come now to end our leisure in this fight! This is a turning point in Viking history; we who have survived thus far stand to accomplish greatness! As the gods are our witnesses, raise your blades up and swear on your blood, your very lives to end their tyranny! Let despair give you strength! Take in your hands your misery and carry it forward! Strike down all evil that dares approach you! So let it be done, DEATH TO ALL DRAGONS!"

"DEATH TO ALL DRAGONS!" Almost the entire crowd of Vikings cheered in tandem. It continued on in a horrible chorus that went on and on and on, a symphony of doom for any dragon that dared to fly over Berk in the coming days ahead. "DEATH TO ALL DRAGONS! DEATH TO ALL DRAGONS!"

"Stoickâ€¦ wha' tha helâ€¦" Gobber muttered.

The chief finished by simply twirling his axe in his hand and tossing the dragon in the air before taking a single sing at it. The Terror's body was sliced cleanly in half, with both halves dropping dead to the ground. By that point, Stoick had already turned to leave the area. The smith took in the appearance of his old friend, finding not a single hint of the man he once knew. In the place of that strict but caring chief was a reaper that would purge dragons from the world in cold, dark rage. This was to be the man that would lead Berk on in this war, but where he would take themâ€¦ he shuddered to think.

Nowhere good, he thought.

Behind him, Spitelout also looked down to Stoick with arms crossed. Rather than sharing in Gobber's worry, he let a toothy smirk unseen by anyone form on his rugged face. This could work out better than he thought.

On the other side of the arena, watching alongside their parents, were Astrid, Snotlout, the twins, and Fishlegs. Among their little band of Vikings-to-be, Stoick's slaughter/performance could have been easily put as having mixed results. Snotlout and the twins were cheering and hollering along with anyone else, even banging on the cage bars, swinging their fists and bouncing like crazy. Astrid had remained completely indifferent to the whole thing, her form and expression closely comparing to one of Hiccup's machines.

Fishlegs, on the other hand, held a look strongly reminiscent of that Terrible Terror in its final few moments, quivering with wide eyes and closing in as much as his quickly growing body would allow him to do.

"Aw, man, did you see that!?" Snotlout yelled.

"Yes, yes I didâ€¦ t-that wasâ€¦" Fishlegs timidly replied.

"I wasn't asking you, Fishface!" The prodigal bully cut him off and let the exited look on his face morph to an arrogant scowl. "Cool Vikings talking here."

"B-Butâ€¦ don't you think that was-"

"Glorious?" Tuffnut chimed in.

"Beautiful?" Ruffnut added.

"Seriously, I think I'm crying. I just wanna rip out my own eyes 'cause at this point, there is nothing else in this world that would be worth watchingâ€¦" The male twin actually felt his eyes water, wiping a tear at the magnificent sight of such bloodshed.

"Youâ€¦ you really enjoyed that?" Fishlegs asked incredulously. "Guys, seriously, Stoick isn'tâ€¦ I mean, he doesn'tâ€¦ not usually-"

"Okay, if you're gonna bore us with your talking, talk right!" Snotlout cut in.

Fishlegs let out an airy squeak before turning to Astrid, who seemed to ignore the rest of them and only continued to look down. Somehow, even just watching that empty look of hers that emulated that of their chief down in the arena made him seize up. Recent memory found her to show only similar coldness, devoting most of her free time outside whatever chores she was tasked to complete for the day to her shield-maiden training.

Most times, even in passing, it seemed she was constantly inspecting her own form, analyzing herself for any flaws or imperfections in as much as the way she stood or walked, only ever bothering to speak when she was spoken to. And in the rare moments that they had managed to capture her attention when she was with them, she gave an expression that clearly noted how she didn't even want to be there.

Regardless of her attitude, Astrid believed in their Viking virtues without any hint of doubt and leaving no room for debate when she argued in their favor. But even as she stared down to the bloodied form of their chief, he wondered if even she could have found some way to argue that his new, more brutal ideals could be right.

Best not to talk and stay safe than be a rebel if he was to be alone in this, Hiccup was a good example of that. "Uh, never mindâ€¦"

Snotlout just stared dumbly for a minute before his pudgy face contorted in annoyance. "AARGH! Seriously, with you it's almost as bad as when Useless was still around!"

"Y-you really f-feel that way?"

"Are you kidding? Don't tell me you miss that little loser?" Snotlout asked with an evil eye, to which Fishlegs quickly shook his head. "Good, like that pest wasn't around long enough. Couldn't have happened sooner if you ask me!"

"But h-he was your cousin!"

"Ugh, don't remind me!"

"I bet he screamed like a little girl before he burned!" Tuffnut chuckled.

"Nah, I'll bet he screamed like you. Little girls sound way too manly!" Ruffnut giggled, earning a scowl from her brother. "I just wish it could have been more bloody. You know, like if there was a dragon there with him."

"Yeah, and it chomped his head right off! And then gobbled the rest of him up like a chicken leg! How cool would that have been!?" The male twin cheered.

"Come on, it was Hiccup! That's like just getting the bone!" They giggled again.

"Who cares how he sounded or how it happened â€“ he's dead now and sweet Thor, I am loving every single minute of it!" Snotlout cruelly cheered.

"Guysâ€¦ d-don't let Stoick hear youâ€¦" Fishlegs continued but was cut off by the angry glares of Snotlout and the twins. "â€¦s-s-say s-stuffâ€¦ l-like thatâ€¦" He quietly mumbled while looking away, pressing his fingers together.

"Why? You think he's gonna care?" Snotlout scoffed. "Get real! Like anybody even liked him when he was still around; everybody got over Useless ages ago, and from the look of things, Uncle Stoick's finally done the same. That worthless little fishbone is better off dead to us. He can't tick anybody off or hold anybody back, and there's not a single person here who misses him because that's all he ever did! Things couldn't possibly be any better now that he's finally out of the way!"

"Well-" Fishlegs chimed.

"Oh, well, apart from me getting to be chief of course! I doubt you'll find anybody more perfect for the job!"

"Except maybe a yak!" Tuffnut chimed. Snotlout gave him a good punch in retaliation.

Fishlegs took a breath in preparing to speak, but instantly realized in how it was to be used to wimpily speak out against their indifferent laughter at a dead boy's expense that it was a wasteful one. In the days since Hiccup's death, the chubby boy found himself getting picked on as often and in much the way he had, despite how Fishlegs had taken such drastic precautions in abandoning his old friend and selling himself off as an accessory to Snotlout to spare himself the heartache of social rejection.

He could have cried in frustration at how unfair it was, for all his self-serving strategies and all he had given up only to be designated by the others as the new black sheep of Berk; all he wanted in the end, past the remorse for Hiccup's tragic end or fear for Stoick's terrifying change, was to be safe and away from conflict, out of the line of fire entirely.

"Fishlegs." The mentioned boy turned to the source of the emotionless, commanding tone that addressed him to find it was Astrid herself. She was now staring straight at him, although her one pair of eyes felt more like a thousand bearing down on him with all their intimidating weight. Anger didn't seem to be as evident on her face as it was in her tone, the only one she even bothered to use at all

anymore.

"Forget your remorse, for Hiccup or those dragons." Astrid gestured to each of the ravaged dragon bodies that lied down in the arena still, covering the entire stone with their pools of blood. "This is the way things are, and there's no place for sympathy about it; whatever happened, happened."

"Butâ€¦ H-Hiccup wasâ€¦ w-w-what h-happened-"

"Was for the best. Stoickâ€¦ our parentsâ€¦ what they did then and what they do now is for the good of everyone. They understand better than any of us what's right for Berk. The life of one _weakling_ was all it took to open people's eyes to what we needed to do from here on out. That's the best thing _he_ could have done for his people."

She turned away and left, disappearing into the crowd of large raucous Vikings; her word then was her final on the matter as it had always been. Their former heir had served his purpose as a martyr and now all of Berk was done with him, his memory not worth clinging to. Astrid no longer even had the compassion to even say his name, to acknowledge him as a human being who had his own life, however wasteful it might have seemed. As she and Snotlout had said, the Hooligan Tribe was finally relieved of their diminutive handicap, and now that Stoick had once again regained his fire, Berk was back on the path to a glorious future of bloodshed and conquest. For that, she was happy.

Yet as Fishlegs was completing his chores later on that afternoon, he heard the distinctive sounds of an axe on wood. Putting down the piles of sweaty laundry he was helping his mother with, he headed off to the edge of the forest. He quickly crouched behind a rock and peeked out to see the young shield-maiden herself tossing her axe into each of the trees. Each time it landed, she would yank it back out and she would do it again. It was one of the ways she practiced her strength and accuracy, a habit she just picked up that not long after Hiccup's tragic accident. Her parents promoted it all the time, even when they didn't even know why or how she came up with it, they just liked how it would make her a much better warrior in the long run.

Really, though, it was just something she did when she was frustrated.

The plot thickens, eh? Spitelout had more planned than just getting rid of a nephew he didn't like, and as for Astrid, wellâ€¦ like I said, no spoilers.

At this point, I am starting to consider getting a beta reader for my stuff. Someone to look over what I have and give me suggestions to improve it. I'm thinking I might need one specifically for my dialogue. I'll make it clear â€“ I have experience writing essay-wise, but I've never really done anything like posting multi-chapter stories like this. I'm not entirely familiar with how the process works, but let me know in a PM if you want to apply.

Meanwhile, go on ahead and keep reviewing, favoriting, and following. Thanks for all of your support; till next time!

13. Chapter 13

Hello, Fanfiction. It's certainly been a while, hasn't it? So much has happened since I updated last â€“ I graduated from college, I had my birthday, Fourth of July, and everything. Currently I'm in the midst of looking for a job and a few other projects. But I will still press on with this. I certainly won't be disappointing any of you who enjoy this story so much and want to see it move on.

With that said, I too got to see the new season of Dragons: Race to the Edge. Everything looks awesome â€“ lots of humor (Tuff and his chicken), lots of drama, lots of dragons. I've definitely gotten some ideas for stuff I can put into this story thanks to the new episodes. More importantly, it's gotten me reenergized to write again. Thing is, I had been putting my stuff on hold cause my HTTYD love tank was dried out â€“ it's a think with lots of folks, do one thing, move onto another. But I'm back in the swing of things now.

Now then, let me address some reviews:

PantheraTigr: I understand where you're coming from with this 'not much plot' thing, but in my defense, I haven't given you much to go on. The thing is, those vague plots are interesting to me because they keep the readers guessing as to what happens next. There are plenty of points in the story that are important, and by the end of this first 'arc,' everything's going to culminate up. Just bear with me â€“ it's all part of a greater design.

WhiteWinterStar: I know it's getting pretty dark, and this chapter isn't going to be much better. But bear with it, there will be plenty of light-hearted stuff moving on. Everything has a purpose.

DannyPhantom619: We'll get to the cool stuff eventually. That being said, I know it's fantasy and all, but let's not blow it out of proportion.

And I'll just address sever of you guests, as well as RainGoddess2040, CMR Rosa, Djberneman, and others: All you people wanting Hiccup to exact revenge on Berk for what they did â€“ I can't say it'll be that intense or rage-filled. Hiccup has a bit of soul-searching to do on this little journey of his. When he comes out of it, he'll be quite a bit more mature, because let's face it, Hiccup's not the revenge-enacting type.

All right, without further ado, let's get this started!

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* * *

><p>The sky was dark and frigid as the downpour of rain showered down upon unfortunate travelers, and white hail plummeted downwards and smashed down with great ferocity. The sea raged violently, great black waves tainted with white froth forming and crashing against the sturdy ship that valiantly sailed through the great storm. The ship, used to such terrible weather, prevailed as the sailors tussled with the sails that threatened to be torn off by the shrieking gales or

scrambled to ensure that their precious cargo was not thrown overboard, ignoring the small welts of pain that came from the hail as the freezing downpour drenched them head to toe. Shouts of instructions for order and vehement curses were lost in the wind, leaving only the deafening sounds of the screeching gales and the torrential crashes of ocean water against the hull of the ship. Despite the desperation of the men, this was not the first time such a thing had occurred on their voyages, especially in this horrid corner of the world.<p>

Three years, short to some and long to others, was all it took in order to dye this monochromatic world the darkest blood red ever seen in the past three centuries.

The Barbaric Archipelago had always been worthy of its name, the Vikings of old choosing the absolute worse place to live when they had decided to settle on the small islands abundant at every corner of its waters. The majority of their landscapes comprised of small mountains that could never properly situate houses due to their high altitude and treacherous slopes. The remaining flatland held no value for agriculture due to its poor, rocky soil nowhere near fertile for any kind of crops to bloom, and whatever did could hardly be considered edible. Wood from the island's forest was limited and almost hastily reduced to nothing due to a combination of impatience and continuous demand for the quick repair of destroyed homes and ships. Few animals found themselves able to survive upon the lands, farms only really able to hold sparse amounts of sheep or yaks.

Harsh winters beset the islands year-round, with wind chills that could go from mild to severe in the span of a single day, forming massive ice sheets that immobilized many a sailing ship and bury whole houses in thick blankets of snow. Too often sailors found their skin black and blistered from frostbite, and due to poor medical knowledge that only went as far as mashing long spoiled herbs together, most who suffered often found themselves infected and left to die slow, painful deaths if treated even a moment too late. Many turned down treatment anyway in favor of tens of tankards of ale and adoring fans at his table, viewing it as unneeded and even cowardly to try and erase each scar turned medal for heroics in battle.

No doubt to anyone it was a savage and merciless place, and only those just as savage, and idiotic, possessed the capability to survive. Despite their survival constantly resting on a knife's edge, the fools called it home and wouldn't trade it for anything, no matter how enticing the offer might have looked in recent times.

Battles and raids occurred on a far more frequent basis as starving dragons raided more and more food every other night. The isles of the various tribes could barely survive the ravenous onslaughts; the continuous fiery rain of dragons that crashed down surged on even as they were sliced down piece by piece from claws and fangs. Houses would not even be half rebuilt before they were burned down again, nor could they provide shelter for any of their former occupants. The Great Halls of each island, the only havens adequate enough to protect them, were made into permanent residences for those now condemned to witness their meager histories reduced to ash. Populations whittled down, lost lives were now a guarantee each time the raids occurred, regardless of age or skill. From experienced

warriors to defenseless shepherds; none were safe.

At long last this simple solution, their classic fallback of charging ever forward and overpowering the enemies while enduring far beyond the limits of body and heart began to fail them.

The few Vikings who could be considered strategists amongst their peoples all seemed to come to the same conclusion: the dragons had grown even more desperate and would not stop at anything until they took every last fish, sheep and yak from their food storages. And so the Vikings came to the conclusion that, in order to ensure the future and welfare of their people, they would fight with the same desperation as the beasts that raided them.

Though this could hardly have been seen as a united front, each Viking tribe more or less preoccupied with concerns of their own safety. Food storages on every island remained near empty, despite the best efforts of fishing boats sent out day after day to feed an ever-growing number of starving mouths.

With so little food and resources, and the constant strain of the raids only further dwindling it all down, many of the tribes found themselves easily compelled to break off the many long-standing treaties that bound them in loyalty to one another and ironically enough, follow in the example of their hated reptilian enemies. Heated brawls over food with individual starving Vikings desperate to feed themselves quickly became wars based on indignation and betrayal between entire tribes, and soon reduced to spite alone, fighting for and with less and less each time, with no true end in sight. The bleakness of it all managed to convince those who had little to nothing left to leave their destroyed homes altogether in hopes of a new life far, far away from the troubles that clung to the Archipelago in a death hold.

Three years.

That was all it took for the Viking tribes that had always stood strong with iron-clad fortitude against centuries of death and despair to rust and crumble in both spirit and in form. Any alliances upheld by shared blood and bloodshed alike that had been a staple of the tribes' continued survival were ripped to shreds as though their bonds were nothing more than wet parchment. Three years was all it took for the various Viking tribes to turn on one another like rabid wolves, with no current hope for reconcilement.

The answer that many outside parties gave to that disturbing reality?

'_Who cares? It's their problem_.'

None spoke that answer more coldly or loudly then the groups of hunters who sailed in between the isles, ignoring war's viral and diseased touch**:** the dragon trappers.

Similar enough in appearance to Vikings, though their garbs of thick fur coats and boiled leather and finer cloth adornments and simplistic contempt for all dragon kind were almost all the two groups had in common with one another. Rather than the pure hatred and pride that drove Vikings to kill first with everything they had, what drove the trappers was a voracious greed for gold and other

luxuries. Trappers would never kill dragons outright as their barbaric neighbors would; rather the dragons would be captured, left starving and shivering in metal cages, and sold off to the highest bidder, be they Viking, aristocrats from the Roman shores, or kings looking to add to their exotic collections. For anything from gold to jewels to ships and weaponry, the fact remained that with the abundance of the creatures the trappers needed but a few short years and they could retire in good fortune. But very few ever did, if for no other reason than to continue filling their overflowing pockets or feel the joy of breaking the beasts until the day they died.

No one could really remember when the practice of dragon trapping had first begun, probably around the time of the war's beginning itself. Who could say when anyone first or ever saw any kind of worth in those monsters, even if only monetary? Nevertheless the greed born in those first few despicable men's hearts survived on to the present day, the ageless glint of gold the only light in those empty eyes illuminating those frost-bitten faces with their grim, hideous grins of rotted and missing teeth.

'_Let this world of fools perish. We, the ones who carry the spoils of war, are the only true victors__**,' **_were the unspoken words that passed through the gaps.

At long last after hours of sailing did the winds begin to die down and the icefall and rain lessened considerably to a more gentle snow. The sudden change in weather was a natural line that marked the boundary of the Barbaric Archipelago, and all the men breathed in hushed relief. Their work continued, suddenly much more audible, keeping the sails straight to catch the winds or man the oars to paddle when said wind was not in their favor. The path they set was a ways to the southwest from the Barbaric Archipelago, just upon its border encroaching very close into Roman territory, near the kingdom of Evrensel.

Anyone who had ever seen the kingdom of Evrensel could easily called it a rough conglomerate of the Romans' advanced culture and customs and the Vikings' barbarism and dated traditions. A city-state situated on what was perhaps the largest island to exist in the northern waters, Evrensel had long stood as a powerful, thriving theocratic empire of stone and steel, ahead of its time in many aspects of its society. The vista of imposing, elaborate castle tower-esque buildings whose heights challenged the flight prowess of the dragons, perfect stone walkways scattered all throughout its reaches in tangled skeins, and decorated open-air plazas where hundreds gathered at every hour. All were strong reflections of a history of grandeur reaching beyond even the beginnings of the war.

But to call it a kingdom of stone and steel meant also to describe the coldness of its citizens and nobility. A bustling empire such as this, large enough to be called a small country, naturally came with classes, and with classes came prejudice.

On the upper levels were those who lived ever pampered lives of comfort and luxury, practically tossing money to the streets in their frivolity. Much in the way the trappers themselves thought, these aristocrats and naturally blessed would think their gold was what made the world turn. Condemning others to unjust fates by bowing their heads or turning their backs was not much of a stretch. Any

injustice that did not fall upon them exactly was either mild amusement or just wasn't worth the wasted worry.

On the lower levels existed an abundance of the dirt poor: vagabonds, thieves, rogues, and thugs, many so from the moment of their birth to their last breath. Their section would receive the brunt of most attacks that would come upon their shores, the majority of the residences having quite visible scarring or reduced to rubble altogether. Most would be forced to engage in shady deals just to procure their next meal or gain a roof over their heads, more often times leading to heavy debt that lead to silent murders in between dark alleys. Though they could live lives of pure freedom as opposed to the wealthy who constantly looked down upon them, the lack of any kind of home or proper income made it rather pointless.

Between these unfortunate folk who lived by the creed 'survival of the fittest' and the upper echelons who easily ignored any indirect misfortune, the walls between the people were many.

Thoughts of social separation meant little to the trappers as opposed to the color of coin either side had. Just get the beasts delivered, get their pay, get a drink and some more supplies, and finally get lost. That was the way of their little corner of Midgard: just focus on your own problems.

The dragons that filled the many fire-resilient cages were of great variety, though rarity was another thing entirely. Multitudes of the common breeds: Nadders, Gronkles, Zipplebacks, and even the odd Monstrous Nightmare or two â€“ those always scored the biggest hauls. Even a few odd Terrors were there, though the folks over at Evrensel never paid much for them. Still, it never hurt to keep every kind of possible order in stock. All the dragons remained silent, not even being bothered to be muzzled as not a single roar, growl or even whimper or chirp came from them; the beasts had long since given up hope of freedom.

Save for one little blue-green Terror in one of the smaller cages at the back, who shrieked and growled and rattled the bars, lifting itself up on its tiny wings and banging against the sides. One of the trapper's more recent capture, who had yet to give in as its more powerful kin had. All these efforts had gained it was a swift kick in the side of its cage, sending it rolling across the deck of the ship and reeling by the side when it stopped.

"Oy, settle down, ya stupid lizard!" Yelled the hooded trapper who delivered the kick. Decked from head to toe in furs, his size, glare and rotted teeth gave him the full appearance of a grizzly bear. The Terror only hissed back, though its bravado was easily seen through.

The trapper scoffed and spit right in the little dragon's eye before making his way to the bow of the boat where his other companions stood. Dressed much the same, in furs of every kind of animal accented by dulled plates, wearing fur-lined caps, straps and pouches made to secure various weapons and lures to bring their prizes in. The facial hair on each of their faces was considerably less next to the long, braided beads of the Vikings, one lone black haired one only sporting a mustache. A red haired one with a simple goatee sported numerous jeweled necklaces as symbol of his many years and rewards in the trade.

The three huddled together trading glances with one another with their dirty pelts highlighted by the pure white of simple snow. "Ah, I oughta just retire now if this is all these stupid Viking islands a've got to offer." The first hooded one grumbled crossing his arms.

"Aye, nothin' but lousy garden-variety. Couldn't even snag us a Thunderdrum or Whispering Death. At least those get ya a solid week at an inn." The second one with red hair replied. "Don't plan on spendin' yer afternoon countin' coins with these rejects."

"They don't even put up any fight anymore, save for that damn miserable Terror over there." The first one gestured over to the Terror still placed away from the others. "How's that gonna look to the buyers?"

Most nobles in Evrensel and other places paid top coin in order to gain dragons as exotic pets, something about stamping their intimidating figure down on their rivals. Though it was hardly a satisfying life for the giant reptiles. They would be put in arenas to battle each other to the death at a bloodthirsty crowd's pleasure, or their scales and spines would be ripped away to make crude, lavish outfits or decorative weapons. Needless to say, the dragons needed to be in pristine condition and have plenty of fight left in them, just enough to make a show at the auctions. This pitiful state most of them were in nor would hardly attract customers; it wasn't even looking to the trappers like they were even worth the effort to catch.

"Nothin' like how they were when we first snagged 'em and tossed them, surely, but is it that bad?" The third black-haired one asked.

"Listen, mates. I've been doin this job for thirty years. Okay, _thirty years_," The second one spoke again, stroking the hairs on his chin. "Dragon trappin these days ain't nearly as good as it was then, and even those couldn't compare to the days those blasted Night Furies flew the skies. Now those trophy beasts were where the gold came flockin' in. And if they were o' proper size, the fanatics would empty their purses of every last coin."

"The Unholy Offspring o' Lightning an' Death, eh? Oh, what I'd give to snag one o' those. I'd break its muzzle, snap its wings and throw it in the biggest cage we had, just for the chance to watch it snap and squirm. Keep yer coin, I'm in it fer the thrill of the hunt. A Night Fury'd be sure to bring more sport than these sorry things." The first one replied gesturing back to the others.

"Well, why not go for one more sail around, maybe a little closer to the Nest? Might be a couple zoomin' around. We're sure to spot 'em around this time." The third one offered.

"You've got the brains of a dead boar, you know that?" The second one shouted. "Wanna know how Night Furies fetch such a high price? It's because they're incredibly rare, elusive, not to mention intelligent! Why do you think those stubborn-as-hell Vikings who keep getting' hammered by dragon attacks have never seen one before!?"

"'Cause as the name implies, they only fly at night." The first one

spoke. "You'd need the eyes of a falcon to even spot a glimpse o' one."

"So, let's wait for night, grab some falcons, an-"

"Don't press yer luck." The second one cut off the third. "Our predecessors got the same idea and it worked wonders. It's been decades since a Night Fury was last spotted. All o' 'em, shot outta the sky like turkeys!" He shook his head and sighed grumpily. "No matter how you look at it, that was sheer stupidity â€“ all that gold down the poop deck. Leave it our greedy forefathers to leave the younger generation to scrape out a livin."

"Imagine wha' you could do with all that gold, some new boots, a sword that sparkles like diamond like those knights in Evrensel have. Maybe even some jewels better than yours!" The third one chortled, shoving his finger right into the second one's chest just below his necklaces.

"Ah, shut it, you idiot." The first one growled. "You'll be happy to know we'll be taking you up on yer offer." He silently gestured to the second with a lock of the eyes and together they began readjusting the sails of the ship, yanking hard on the ropes. The giant cloth of the vessel caught the change of wind's direction and turned it in a different direction, diverting them from their previous course. The second began barking orders to the others from across the lapping waves, snapping the men to attention as they yanked on their ropes in turn, the massive ship soon turned completely to the southwest direction it faced before.

"Eh, what offer?"

"We're headed to the Dragon Nestâ€¦" The second one grunted, still turned away and watching the steady return of each of their ships to formation.

"WHAT!? You-you mean you really know where it is?" The third one stuttered.

"Whad'ya take us for, Vikings? We trappers make it a habit to find out where each Nest is. Makes it easier to find a worthwhile catch if you know where they flock." The first chuckled darkly.

"But how'd ya find it? I mean, the Vikings have been searchin' fer years, and-"

"And now they're content to simply kill each other, figuring they'll die one way or another. Yeah, Vikings may be big n' sturdy but they're on the small side when it comes to brains, in case you haven't noticed." The second one said, tapping on his own temple. "All they know is that the Nest is somewhere in the area of Helheim's Gate, as fitting as that is. They can't find it, an' they always get killed tryin'â€¦ but the dragons know just where to go."

"So guess how we figured it out?" The first one asked.

The third trapper scratched his head, looking utterly perplexed as he pondered the question. "Uhâ€¦ dragons?" He guessed dumbly.

The first trapper snorted and rolled his eyes at his vague answer

with scorn. "Yeh, all you need is a dragon, some rope, a few braces, and a ship ta get you there. From there, the beasts become our gracious hosts to riches aplenty. It's clear as day and yet no one on those islands even bothers to piece it together."

The second trapper wrinkled his nose in open disdain and contempt in regards to the Vikings that "All the better, I'd sayâ€¦ Those damn meatheads kill more than enough of our profits without knowin' where the Nest isâ€¦ they'd no doubt try and rid the Nest of all the beasts, an' no doubt fail. Heh," the trapper smirked suddenly as he chuckled, "Maybe we should let 'em know. The lizards would tear them apart easily, an' we'd have 'em all to ourselves."

All three trappers chuckled, their laughs almost freezing inside their throats from the terrible coldness of the night.

Just then, a noise emerged from above in the sky; only one of the trappers appeared to hear it as he turned his head upward, his head cocking to the side just slightly. The sound was completely alien to him, made by no such creature that he was aware of: silent and eerie, soft like wind whistling through the grass, or like a hissing snake concealed in between the blades, ready to strike.

"D'you two hear that?" he asked his comrades with a frown.

"Hear what?"

"I could'a sworn I heard something in the skyâ€¦ Ah think somethin's up there, but I've no clue what. It's givin' me chills just imaginin' it."

One of the trappers openly scoffed at his fearful words, "There ain't no sound. Are you goin' daft or something?"

But, as the dubious trappers waved off the other's concerns, the sound returned, much louder and closer than before. Distance considered, it was far too large to be a bird of any sort, yet the sound had come had gone much too quickly to be any normal kind of dragon. The trappers, for all the vast knowledge of dragons their professions had given them, were left too utterly baffled by these new, unknown circumstances to make any kind of guess.

All of a sudden, the ship was quiet, much too quiet for their liking. The snow continued to fall onto their freezing forms, leeching the warmth from their bodies, and the crew members grew silent and tense, a chill blossoming within them from both the cold and uneasy fear.

There was a moment of eerie silence, where the only sound that anyone could hear was the gentle lapping of water against the hull, the rugged breathing of their neighbors, and the growls of the trapped dragons continuing their struggle within their cages. The three men suddenly looked around, feeling the sudden rise in tension from their the raised hairs on their necks; even their fur cloaks seemed to bristle as if the skinned and killed animals they came from from came alive again to warn them. Before they even knew it, their shaky hands reached for the jagged swords stored at their hips and the heavy oaken shields on their backs. They began to pace carefully across the deck, slowly darting their eyes back and forth. Beads of sweat fell down their faces, freezing into ice almost instantaneously.

The silence extended out in intense ripples all across the ship, stopping them quicker than if their anchors had dropped and trapped them. The boat floated and bobbed on the water, and all at once the men could feel the frigidness grip their bodies, even feeling its icy touch upon their souls. No one could bring themselves to move, as again and again the sound was heard, the dragon circling over them. Yet each time they lifted their now lead-weighted heads to look, the figure was gone, the sky completely empty.

Waiting, waiting, just waiting. Whoever this new enemy was, it seemed intent on just drawing out the game, as if to only relish their growing apprehension.

Too soon, it became too much to bear, and amongst the lot, men began to snap. With screams of impatient terror, they launched everything they could get their hands on through the air. Boulders, arrows, nets, anything and everything that carried the slim chance of shooting their unseen assailant down. They didn't know what they were facing but they'd be damned if they just let a dragon toy with them in such a manner.

"KNOCK IT OFF! HOLD FIRE, HOLD FIRE!" The red haired man shouted from across his ship. "Idiots! Don't go shootin' blind!"

Like a chain reaction, the sailors overheard the main command and passed it out to amongst their panicked numbers. The next few moments of bring the crew back under control were an absolute mess, with men running across every inch of the deck like crazy. Some had to be punched down to be calmed, but the shouts eventually stopped and the skies were clear of any dragon-catching tools. The bad news was that now their ammunition was completely spent, the large majority of it were now bobbing on the water and slowly sinking down to the bottom. If the dragon hadn't been miraculously shot down in all the chaos, they certainly would have no way to bring it down now.

The red-haired trapper growled and seethed, charting a small, steaming path across the water with his glare at each of his incompetent men. From behind, the dragons started to rise up again: indignant growls and chortles from each of the caged beasts that unnerved the once-superior trappers. As if they were mocking them for their weak nerves.

"Oy, shut up! Shut your mouths, you stupid lizards!"

"Watch who yer laughin' at!"

The hooded and black haired trappers had to grab their weapons and slam them against the cage. The head splitting sound rent its horrible curse of pain amongst the dragons, disorienting their senses and blurring their surroundings around them. They quickly succumbed to the horrible headaches that always came, shaking their heads, stumbling around in their cages and finally just dropping to the ground. But the two only continued, if not for sadistic pleasure then for the rage that somewhere in the sky, their unseen assailant was still laughing at them as these dimwitted beasts were.

One of the men was simply watching, growling back, enjoying the air of superiority that only filled human lungs at that moment. What he figured was only a faint shadow behind him took him by surpriseâ€¦

when it slashed him across the back.

The others were alerted by the sound of his body collapsing onto the deck with a loud thud, bathed in his own blood spurting out from above and pooling from below. The culprit behind the terrible would stepped forward, placing a dirty boot on the man's back. The surprise of those men there was beyond words to find that the one who had struck the man down and left him to drown in his own life fluids was only a child, about 11 or 12 winters old.

Though, draped in a tattered tunic with a fur jacket, a scarf to cover one half of his face and a hood to conceal the other, wearing a small cloak of sewn black scales, and wielding two weathered, serrated blades that could be ranked midway between daggers and swords, this was no ordinary child. Watching his clothes flutter in the cold breeze, his entire face concealed by an almost eerie darkness, they were not even convinced that what stood before them was even human.

"Wha-What theâ€¦?"

The child approached, the presence he held simply looming before them utterly terrifying, like a silent, vengeful specter. Every unheard step he took was as if he walked on mere air, yet blasted forth like a beat of wind from a dragon's wings, piercing through their thick skins. The trappers stood together, each one wedged between their fellow men seeking comfort in their familiarity and numbers. Their own hands trembled greatly, their feet shuffling back only able to inch their way towards their sheaths and reach for their weapons.

"W-What d'ya think that isâ€¦?"

"D-Don't be stupid, it's just some kidâ€¦" The red-haired trapper pointed out to the other men onboard.

"Y-y-yeah, b-but how did he get onto our s-s-ship?" The black-haired trapper quaveringly asked. "W-we're surrounded by sea for m-miles on end!"

"H-He's probably just some s-stowawayâ€¦" The hooded one pointed out, trying to establish reason no matter how unlikely.

"A stowaway? Y-you think he snuck on?"

By then the fear had settled in, but so to did curiosity as they tried to view the being, whatever it was, in a way that made sense to them so it suited their needs and quenched their fears. And it was there, as all denied what was there before them for the comforting feel of control, came the sickly parasite of man's foolish arrogance that dwelled within all hearts. Though the creature had appeared from nowhere, there was no reason to believe it dangerous- or rather, more dangerous than _them_.

This, surely was no monstrous devil that had come from the ocean, nor a vengeful wraith, but a _trick._

"T-That must be it! He's just some sneaky brat that wanted a free trip somewhere!" One of the trappers exclaimed, dark brown eyes looking at the silent figure haughtily, looking at the boy with

contempt. "Just some spoiled brat running from whatever rathole he was dropped in, tryin' to trick us." He spat on the floor, still looking at the boy with disgust, his scarred fingers tracing the hilt to his sword. "But we're smarter than that; takes more than some sorry-ass runaway to scare us."

The other trappers seemed to gather around him, taking comfort in his words and muttering their agreements. All the while gradually rebuilding the smirks they wore before, scoffing at how terrified they had been of a pathetic child.

"But t-t-there are no spots to hide on the ship! And we've been s-s-sailin' for months!"

And at that moment, at the reminder of how the boy had appeared, the doubt returned and their courage fell to a strong surge of fear. As the boy stepped closer, his form lurching forward fluidly in a way that seemed dragonesque, the memories of the words that eased their doubts and reassured them of their own abilities slipped from their minds entirely. This boy couldn't simply be a normal child. No one could be capable of appearing on this ship undetected in the midst of such stormy weather and so far away from any charted land, nor could any real being move in such a graceful and terrifying way.

Perhaps this was indeed no human, but instead a dragon that had used its devil arts to take the form of a boy to walk among them. The eerie sound they heard from above must have been the flap of his wicked wings as he sliced the air around him, and now he bared his blades to slice them to bits.

Before they could even blink, the boy bared his twin bladesâ€¦ and charged.

He flew past one man and sliced him in the side before swinging back on a foot and slicing another before he came to a stop. The motion was entirely fluid, like a fish swimming through the water in the eyes of the remaining men. The masked child dashed along the side of the deck and approached two others, who by now had recovered and had their axes in the air, slamming them down on the deck to cut him clean open. The boy only slightly moved to dodge both of their strikes, their axes crashing into the wooden deck in a flurry of splinters and chips. He swung and sliced their hands, nearly taking out their fingers in disarming them, ending in a spin that cut them right across both of their chests.

Another dash took the boy straight towards the red-haired captain himself, raising his right blade to strike and pierce his gut. The captain was just able to raise his axe to block the blow, the tip striking the iron axe and leaving barely any damage. The captain gave an uneasy smirk noticing the boy's lack of striking power, relying more on speed to bring down any unguarded opponents. Against his axe's durability, the blades would barely be able to do any lasting damage.

The boy seemed entirely unfazed to the captain, instead leaping up and striking down with both blades. He raised his axe again to block, the boy swung and slashed upward with his left, then swung the other way to slash with his right. All his attempts blocked, but still the boy showed no signs of hesitation; he leaped back and charged forward with both blades crossed, repelled by the captain's blade once more.

Each clash and the sparks of metal that appeared as a result only gave limited visibility to the boy's face, but still the captain couldn't make out any discernible expression.

Pulling back once more, the boy found himself surrounded by the remaining men â€“ five or six at the most, including the hooded trapper, the black-haired trapper, and the captain. For a moment, they all paused. The trappers looked at their captain for orders, unease clear in their eyes, and the boy simply grasped onto his sword before turning his head over so slightly towards the portside, as though he had seen something that none of the others could see.

"Enough lollygaggin'! Finish the brat!" With the captain's order, the hooded man and black-haired trapper charged forward.

The boy jumped and actually landed on the crossed blades wielded by the two before vaulting himself back over to the mast. Using his left blade he cut one of the ropes and grabbed it, letting himself be carried up towards the sky. The trappers just watched as his already tiny body was reduced to a mere speck, and before he could come down, a mysterious shape zipped past and snatched him up, leaving the skies empty once more.

"W-wha happened?" One of the few remaining men asked.

"He just vanished!"

"He was a dragon, wasn't he? Just pulled out his wings an' took off!"

The men on each of the surrounding boats were only able to watch in horror as the mysterious boy made mincemeat of each of the lead ship's crew. Their foolish mistake of using up all their tools combined with the slow movements of their boats left them unable to do anything as their comrades were ambushed and slaughtered before their eyes. They cursed their powerlessness watching it all, only letting the anger bubble up directed at the boy before it all turned to bitter confusion as he disappeared.

Even the dragons were confused, but there was something akin to recognition in their brightly glowing eyes. The dragons stayed silent, but the trappers could see the tension building in their muscular bodies, as though preparing forâ€¦ _something_. The troublesome Terrible Terror that had been kicked so brutally looked up at the armed trappers, wicked amusement burning in its amber eyes. The captain had a brief thought of how the nasty little lizard seemed almost _smug._

Contrary to the insane theories they were spouting, they knew what had really happened. They recognized the dreaded sound of that dragon's wingbeats. They just didn't think they would ever hear that sound againâ€¦

It wasn't possible. That species was _dead. _Extinct, killed off by the greedy trappers that came before them. But nowâ€¦ it appeared as though they had been proven wrong.

The whistling sound returned again, as frightening as it ever was, and all at once the humans and dragons came back to attention. The

ears of the men on each of the boats perked up upon discovering that instead of the numerous small whistles they had heard before, a prolonged sound was put in its place. It built up more and more, a shriek of the air that signified doom for all who heard it â€“ an unmistakable call that all thought had been silenced years ago.

"_NIGHT FURY!"_

"Get down!"

But it was too late.

In the center of the circle of men still formed upon the deck of the lead boat, a blast of cobalt light came down and detonated, sending them flying across in all direction. Some collided with the mast, some hit the sides, and one was even knocked overboard. From within the cloud of smoke, the trappers noticed, were a pair of menacing sickly green eyes that pierced through the veil. Those same eyes, glowing with cold intensity, locked onto the captain, and for a moment it felt as though his very soul was snatched from his body. Small gusts of wind blew from the sides and cleared away the remaining smog and flame, revealing the beast in all its nightmarish glory. It's body of pure black, its massive wings, and though it was a bit on the small side, it still held plenty of firepower too much for people of their caliber to handle.

"Dear Godsâ€¦ i-it really is a Night Furyâ€¦" was all the captain could mutter. Looking up, to his eternal shock he saw the boy perched upon the dragon's back. The boyâ€¦ was riding the Night Fury.

An impossibility by all standards, but what struck them in that moment could in no way be considered some manner of self-induced illusion, no matter how much the men wanted to believe it. Never before had there been any record of a human riding atop a dragon. Oh, there were many who tried to tame the beasts by climbing atop their backs, but every time resulted in the indignant beasts rearing back and fighting against the foolishly arrogant human that had dared try to tame the untamable.

But now, staring at the boy sitting atop the dragon's back, it dawned on them how a scrawny child had managed to achieve the impossible. Fear began to settle within them like the frigid air, nestling deep into their bones and blood.

The black-haired trapper was the first to retaliate, seemingly taking the boy by surprise and just barely getting him to raise his weapon in time. The wild attack from the trapper's swing had managed to relieve the boy of the right blade he raised in his defense, sending it flying and plummeting in the ocean, but his glory was short-lived as the dragon leaped and hovered before him. Its jaws were right in his face, opened wide so he could see the ominous glow of cobalt building up in its cavernous throat. His eyes widened for the final time as the blast came and exploded right into his face, killing the man and bringing his corpse down with a lifeless thud.

A roar of fury came from behind as the hooded trapper came in next, swinging a hammer that was a bit larger than normal. The pair turned and shot out of the way, leaving the trapper to slam right into the corpse of his comrade with enough force to shatter his now-useless

bones. The Night Fury bounced away from the others near the mast of the ship once again with another powerful swing at the ready, but they only dodged out of the way once again. They zipped around the trapper in circles, much quicker than anything he could hope to swing at and bring down â€“ he may as well have been battling the world's most powerful fly, he figured. The 'fly' only looped around and tore into him with its claws, securing itself onto its chest and then leaping off with a strong push before aiming and firing another plasma blast right into his chest, ending him.

Only the captain remained, and the loss of his crew had apparently done nothing to deter him, as like his allies, he came forward with a powerful charge. He leaped over the hole and prepared to come down hard, expecting the young Night Fury to meet him with full force. His axe was at the ready, sharp enough to cleave both dragon and rider with one blow.

He certainly wasn't expecting the boy to bounce up from his seat on the dragon, bounce off the mast with both feet, and collide with him in mid-air. But that was the end result, and the boy had apparently considered his lack of power as when it appeared he was going to collide and clash with him using his one remaining blade, he instead rotated away from the edge. His blade successfully plunged into his shoulder, though his weight was nowhere near enough and they only fell a little ways away from the hole, crashing onto the ground. The captain's weight allowed for a small dent to be made in the deck, effectively trapping him there and leaving him at the boy's mercy.

He waited for the killing blow, for that final burst of pain that meant the end before he passed on. Instead, all he felt was the prolonged hot, throbbing pain of the wound in his shoulder. Directly in his line of sight now was the blood-soaked tip of the boy's blade, right in between his eyes, and the boy with one foot planted right across his chest, with the Night Fury right across his side.

From the angle he was laid at, he could finally make out the eyes of the boy from underneath his dirty, tattered hood. There appeared to be heavy black bags underneath his eyes, signs that he had gone many moons without a hint of rest, perhaps not even blinking. A few strands of hair even slipped through, which were unkempt and messy, covering his eyes even further. But the eyes themselves, that was what sent the deepest chill through him â€“ eyes that had been robbed of any light or innocence, now left completely void, robbed of any life. The terrifying gaze he was given was only distorted thanks to the blood dripping from the sword still extended in front of him; it was all he could do just to catch his own breath, staring in silence for those few moments.

The other ships just continued to watch, everything muted out or erased â€“ indeed the world seemed to be reduced to that one ship in that one moment. They could only speculate, reach into the darkest reaches of their imaginations to assume what might happen. They grabbed onto the sides of their ships' hulls with all their unnerved might, gulping, sweating, and once more waiting.

"W-Wellâ€¦ you're a lot stronger than I thought, aren't ya boyâ€¦?" The captain asked in a futile attempt at getting back his nerve. "Didn't assume it just from lookin' at yaâ€¦"

He let the small talk sink in as he reached over with his hand towards his waist, grabbing the handle of a sword that had been concealed behind his waist. His quick eye managed to catch the flaws each of them had: the boy had little physical strength, and the dragon was obviously too stupid; he was sure to bring down at least one, and the death of whichever it was would undoubtedly leave the other defenseless. Neither of their expressions changed, nor did the blade ever once move, so the captain could only pray to the gods the child was naÃ¯ve enough to find his act believable.

"N-now, nowâ€¦ let's not give such a serious face. A kid like youâ€¦ shouldn't be goin' around on those nasty dragons killin' good, honest folks. I mean, yer human, just like usâ€¦ and a kid too. Kids like you should put on a smile and learn to play nice." The captain gave the mysterious boy a watery grin, revealing his sickening yellowed teeth, his hand trailing slowly towards his sword. "Now, just relax, put on a good grinâ€¦" he spoke, with the hilt of the sword now firm in his grasp.

"â€¦ and DIE!"

The sword was drawn and fully raised in an instant, his arm free to bring it down and run the boy through like meat on a spit. In his psychotic fury, the man cared for little else than killing the boy â€“ everything else, even the immediate memories of his comrades' deaths were completely forgotten. His vision turned near black for everything around him save for the boy, who only turned away, much to his anger.

But suddenly, everything snapped back at once, returning to normal â€“ the captain could see all, including his own sword now deeply embedded into his own stomach. Blood ran like wine from a goblet from his mouth and the wound, which he choked and spluttered on. His heaving became laced with that pungent smell with every pant, save for the moments he coughed heavily and blood was splattered all over his tunic. He raised his head again only to be shoved down by the Night Fury in front of him, its claws dug into his skin, its eyes turned to slits. It was breathing heavily, dangerous silver fangs showing ready to tear his face off while its large wings blocked out any light from the surrounding world. Once again all he saw was darkness, the visage of the terrifying creature replacing that of the boy who had all but vanished.

The trapper clenched his eyes together tightly, refusing to allow the boy to have the pleasure of knowing his growing fears. This was it, the end of it all; his wishes to die in his bed, old and withered, surrounded by his precious treasures was not meant to be. He heard the light footsteps of the dragon rider circle around him, no doubt assessing him in his useless state. He heard a soft breath followed by a croon of pleasure from what he assumed was the Night Fury, even as it continued to press against him, trapping him between it and the deck. Daring to look, he could barely believe the glimpse he had captured, of the boy actually stroking the dragon's snout before turning away.

For a moment all he could hear was light exhales coming from the Night Fury's snout, almost perfectly in time with the light footsteps of the boy wandering towards the caged dragons they had captured. Menacing snarls, growls and hisses replaced them as the boy drew near and noted how the other dragons watched his every move and backed

further into their holds. He stopped right in front of the cages that held a few Deadly Nadders that had proved troublesome to control until the trappers had broken their spirits. There was the sound of the boy attempting to pick the lock, the boy cursing ever so slightly as he fumbled with the rusted thing.

"Little help here, bud?"

The Night Fury opened his mouth and a brilliant purple glow began to build within his maw, casting a small light on the boy's form and several cages. It was immediately discharged as one of its infamous plasma shots, hitting the lock dead-on and shattering the old thing to charred pieces.

The door of the cage swung open, and the Nadder rushed at the boy with a snarl. The boy simply moved to the side, avoiding the gnashing teeth and bristling spikes easily, before he placed a hand somewhere along the beast's neck. In a single moment, the snarls ceased as the dragon relaxed all of a sudden, its spikes lowered as it turned its head at the boy with wide amber eyes, looking rather befuddled. The Nadder sniffed the boy curiously, no doubt catching the scent of the Night Fury. The boy made no sound, gave no hint of fear or tension as he lifted his arm, slowly drawing closer to the beast before pressing his palm against the Nadder's snout. The dragon closed its eyes with pleasure, a small trill erupting from its maw as it nestled its head against the boy's chest.

A boot nudged him in the ribs, making the aching pain in his ribs explore into agony, but the trapper refused to cry out.

"Heyâ€¦ do you know where the Nest is?"

The small voice of the boy tore him from his fear of death. The captain of the now dead crew opened his eyes warily and saw the boy leaning over him. It was amazing that at one second killing the boy was all he could think about, and the next, as alive as he was, he had been completely forgotten.

"Helloâ€¦?" The boy asked, his tone dry and sarcastic.

"W-Whaâ€¦?" The trapper wheezed out, all too aware of the pain burning in his chest.

"Dumb trapperâ€¦ I'm asking you if you know where the Nest is. One of your men mentioned before that it's near Helheim's Gate, and that's all the Vikings knew. So, since you're so much smarterâ€¦ I'm guessing you know."

"Why all the fuss?

"You tortured those dragons." The boy's accusing tone was one of utmost disgust.

"You serious!? Come now, boy â€“ it's not like we're hurting people here! What's wrong with selling and trading a few devils? What's the problem with people using 'em for training and entertainment? We're all getting the good stuff outta life, or what, you don't think those folks deserve a little happiness in their dreary lives?"

"You tortured those dragons."

The trapper scoffed at the boy's words. "Reeducation. When a beast must be trained, it must be broken in order to keep it from getting' ideas about maulin' its new owners. I'm merely saving lives that no doubt would have occurred had those overgrown lizards remained free, and I'm ensuring that my customers are safe as well."

A sharp blade pressed itself against his vulnerable neck, making the captain pause from his raucous blusters. "Well, when you say it like that, suddenly locking dragons up and beating them to near death makes perfect sense." The boy drawled sarcastically. "Seriously, I'm hearing some greedy trapper talk about charity? Saving lives? Don't go screwing everybody thinking you can pull stuff like this and then dress it up with noble sounding crap. Whatever kind of joy or satisfaction you really feel from what you're doing, you can just shove right up where the sun don't shine!"

"What I say is the truth," the trapper growled out, "This is what we trappers do. A stupid brat like you's got no right to interfere."

"I could kill you right now, you know, and no one would care. The world can live without you and your line of work"

The captain would have laughed if the serrated edge of the blade were not so close, though he still managed a derisive snort. "You really are stupid, aintcha kid? You think I care if no one mourns my passing? Heh. Who needs useless fools or their opinions about you? I care only for myself and my coin, and that's enough for me. So if you think your little show is going to scare me, you have another thing comin'."

"Is that right?" the knife cut into his flesh lightly, making the man gasp as he felt the cool metal slice into his warm, vulnerable flesh. A trickle of blood began to run, staining the knife red. "I know how to kill. Just a little more pressure on this knife andâ€¦" he trailed off, but never took his eye off the captain, "presto, one dead trapper, with very little need for coin, I might add. You're lucky I need you alive, for now at least." The boy gestured towards the man's fatal wound, and the Night Fury placed on of his paws atop of the bleeding wound, making the man scream in agony and leak out blood.

The trapper bit on the inside of his cheek to stop the indignant scream that was beginning to form in his chest, tasting the bitter metal tang of blood in his rage. "Whudd'ya need to know?" He spat out.

"The Nest," the boy repeated. "How do I find it?"

"Yeh can ask anyone where it is. No need to kill me when everyone who sails these seas knows," the captain immediately said, inwardly smug. Despite his surprisingly advanced sword work and a Night Fury at his back, the kid was still that,_ a kid._ Kids were gullible, naÃ¯ve and easy to trick, and in such a deadly position, this one was likely to believe anything.

But something flickered across the boy's youthful features, half hidden in shadow that gave him an ageless visage. He spoke softly, but it was full of conviction, "You're lying."

The Night Fury still pinning him down snarled menacingly, teeth bared and hackles raised. His heart stuck in his throat, staring at the serrated fangs and wild eyes of the Night Fury with terror, the trapped couldn't speak.

"You said so yourself; the Vikingsâ€¦" the boy paused at this word, something dark and terrible flashing in his eye, "don't have a clue, other than it's somewhere near Helheim's Gate. I can think of quite a few chieftains would gladly pay through their upturned snouts for information like that and snag the chance end the war once and for all." The boy paused for one tense moment. "And yet they remain in the dark because you trappers don't want them sniffing around your prime hunting grounds. I wonder, is that how you're all able to capture so many dragons in the Archipelago? It must be rather easy to have your trapping grounds border the largest Nest in this ocean. Like fishing cod in a barrel, eh? No wonder you don't want to let it go."

The trapper stiffed, and the boy smiled.

"Hehâ€¦ looks like _I _struck gold. You know there's a such thing as being too greedy, don't you? Letting folks fight for their lives just so you can protect your trade secret?" The boy's smile had twisted into a snarl, making the boy seem more like his silent dragon companion than a normal human. The knife he still futilely gripped in his hand was suddenly snatched away in an instant, though whatever use it might have had to save his life was lost some time ago, he was starting to realize. "Best to forget it all nowâ€¦ don't you lay your hands on another dragon ever againâ€¦ and you can tell that to all your trapper buddies too."

It was then that whatever fear the man felt was replaced by a seething anger, the same anger that filled him only moments before from the humiliation of defeat at a child's hands. He lifted himself up, despite the protesting growls from the Night Fury still on top of him. "Youâ€¦ YOU LITTLE BRAT! Whacking us around, you think yer some kinda big-shot warrior!?"

The boy said nothing from wherever he was, only the sound of clicking locks came as a response as he continued. "Do you have any idea who I am? What I do?"

"Yeah, you're some moron who goes around selling dragons for profitâ€¦"

"Exactly! And I get paid a lot for these beasts you think are worth protectin'! Do you know that I've got nobles and kings who pay near fortunes for these dragons!? Do you really think you'll get away with this!?" The boy turned away emotionlessly and without a word, boiling his blood even further. _"Murdererâ€¦"_ he seemed to breathe out. "You killed your own kind, traitor. And for what?" he cast his eyes upon those of the elusive Night Fury that pinned him down, "For a monster?"

The Night Fury roared loudly, making the trapper flinch at the sheer _rage_ in the beast's eyes. The captain could smell the metallic scent of blood on the dragon's breath, and its roar echoed through the ocean, bouncing across the waves to form a haunting echo. The boy's eyes, meanwhile, were cold, but there was a certain spark ignited within it that was too easily recognized.

Pure, unadulterated hatred that belonged on no one, least of all a child, the type of madness that comes only from a broken soul who had lived a life of misery consumed by the very rage that filled him to hold onto for sanity. This boy had indeed seemed to surrender his own humanity, and who could guess what was left.

The boy placed a hand on the Night Fury's head, nimble fingers stroking the dark scales with love, as though there was nothing more important in the world to the bloodstained boy than the dragon at his side. "You thought I was some pathetic brat who just snuck onboard, and your crew got slaughtered as a result. You think this guy's a monster, but right now I'd say I'm proving you wrong there too. How many more misconceptions about me and my dragon are you arrogant, greedy humans gonna come up with? Maybe you think I'm some snot-nosed greenhorn just breaking in my blades?" the boy laughed. "Oh no, I began long ago.

His words brought a deathly chill to the lone living trapper, and for a few moments all he could feel was utter terror, rage, humiliation. He couldn't even pinpoint any one anymore as his mouth subconsciously opened. "Y-You can't do this- you can't. You won't get away with it, pet Night Fury or not. Your think your little happy-go-lucky human killing twosome'll be able to take down all us dragon trappers the world over? Midgard, or whatever the idiots around here call it, is a bigger place than you think. You're just gonna get yourselves killed trying, whether by us or by the Vikings."

Again the boy flinched at the word. The captain, seeing the weakness, pounced on it. "Yeah, that's right, Vikings â€“ they're none too bright but boy are they nasty! If you want proof just look at how they're tearing each other apart out there! They depend on men like me heavily for what I do; you think you can take on a horde of bloodthirsty Norsemen!? You think you're that lucky!?"

"I don't really care who comes after me. Vikings, nobles, trappers â€“ they're scum all the sameâ€¦" The boy dismissed nonchalantly, yet his words still carried that undertone of pure venom, full of a silent fury that had long been brewing within his small form.

â€¦

"_You serious!? Come now, boy â€“ it's not like we're hunting people here! What's wrong with selling and trading a few devils? What's the problem with people using 'em for training and entertainment? We're all getting the good stuff outta life, or what, you don't think those folks deserve a little happiness in their dreary lives?"
_

â€¦

"_Seriously, I'm hearing some greedy trapper talk about charity? Saving lives? Don't go screwing everybody thinking you can pull stuff like this and then dress it up with noble sounding crap. Whatever kind of joy or satisfaction you really feel from what you're doing, you can just shove right up where the sun don't shine!"_

â€¦

"â€¦D-Don't get smug with me, boy!" The trapper screamed at the top of his lungs watching the boy walk away. "Do you think you can mess with the dragon trappers and get away with i-!"

Those were the final words of the captain as the Night Fury that he had all but forgotten about lunged at him. It chomped on his neck and built up its fires within as he screamed and choked, feeling the unbearable flares of its fire on him. His throat felt that sudden rush of super-heated plasma, melting the skin and burning away at the organs and bones beneath, cutting off his every air. At last it ended, just as the pain stretched on for eternity, and the dragon leapt away, leaving him to collapse lifelessly.

His final sight was the boy atop his dragon once more, surrounded by the other dragons who had been released from their cages, all without his notice. The legion of beasts growled at him with hatred in their tones and in their slit eyes. He could no longer tell if the boy was still staring at him or not, save for the final sentence he gave him.

"Yeah, I think I can." And with that, the young dragon rider took off, leaving the bloodied ship and its dead crew behind.

* * *

><p>Yeah, so another timeskip was involved here. I understand that's a bit frustrating to some, which is why I'm only doing short jumps. As you can see, we've already got a bit of badass Hiccup here. Next chapter will provide insight as to how he got that way and what he's been doing for the past three years. Another thing to note is that the kingdom mentioned, Evrensel, is going to be featured in greater detail later on in the story.

**This chapter was completed with the help of NinjaRiderWriter, who I have now designated as my beta for this story. He had a busy schedule, though, which is partly why it took a while to get this chapter posted. He really helped me capture what I was going for here, and of course, I'll be happy to help with any of his stories. **

Another thing to point out â€“ if you guys want to do any oneshots, fanart, or side stories based on this, let me know in a PM. I'd love to see what you guys come up with.

As always, review, favorite, follow. We're already at the 400s in favorites and follows, but my current goal is to get this into the thousands range in all three categories. So show your support! Till next time!

14. Chapter 14

**So sorry for the wait, everyone. But thanks as always for your patience and for your support in bringing this story up to more than 500 follows. As I said in the update on 'The New Life,' it will be put on hold while I do the next three chapters for this story in a row. It's technically because the story has gotten to a more critical point, where some explanation as to the overall plot will be given. I know some of you are dying for that, while the rest of you are just

gushing over badass Hiccup.**

**Of course, another reason I've been taking so long, besides my cool new internship at a company called Stigma Games (yeah, that's right, I'm interning for a game company) is because I've got a lot of other story ideas swimming around in my head. I'm one of those guys who randomly bounces from one fandom to another without any warning â€“ then again, we're all like that, aren't we? **

I've got ideas for a Yu-Gi-Oh! 5D's story, like the first fanfiction I ever posted on this site that you can see on my profile but never got around to doing (I'll probably delete that one). And also, a story for another card anime called Future Card Buddyfight for those of you that have heard of it, because I seriously think I can do a better job with a story there. Seriously, the plot of that show just sucks. Of course, the ideas for a Big Hero 6 story and the Dragon's Hero sequel are still around as well; we'll just see what happens.

Anyway, all my efforts will be put on this story for the moment, but please support me if I ever do decide to go along with my other ideas. A lot of the people in those aforementioned fandoms have gone off to the next cool thing. Without any further ado, enjoy!

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* * *

><p>The short flight back to the little island Hiccup and Toothless now called home was much more easygoing compared to the overhead prowling they had become accustomed to in recent times. A gentle glide upon the rising currents of air, streaming upon the cold winds, breaking through the protective veil of clouds and fog that shielded them from preying eyes. In another life, perhaps it would have been an enjoyable pastime, feeling at one with the sky, just as they did when they first took flight all those years ago.<p>

But pleasure found no gaps with which to enter and fill the hardened hearts of boy and dragon who now stood against all of humanity. The grim frowns worn by them both upon the trappers' ship still remained settled upon their faces. Joy was now a forgotten memory that the freedom and innocence of winged voyage into a realm untouched by man could not reclaim.

"Another day, another bust, huh, bud?" Was all Hiccup could mutter to his Night Fury.

The ice carried in Hiccup's glare precisely matched the feeling he and his faithful companion now shared: failure. For years they had been hunting for the nest's location, Hiccup believing with a dragon on his side, his chances might be better compared to his father's. Being young, Toothless would have no knowledge himself on where the nest would be located, and other dragons would be of no help, usually settling upon other, uninhabited islands themselves. Trying to track down groups of raiding dragons wasn't possible since they hardly appeared around their wayward island camp. Either that or the overprotective Toothless made it a habit not to let him know.

Finding the nest so as to protect the dragons from being persecuted

by humans was a noble idea, though their constant lack of success was slowly but surely discouraging him. The same downward spiraling path he'd wished to stray from now that the Viking's life was behind him was the only route before him now, leading to a dead end in much the same way.

The boy could freely admit it was his continuous blunders in fitting the Norseman mold and his hatred towards his former kin that motivated him to begin with. But more than that, he had hoped in finding his place in assuming the role of protector of the beasts he now aligned himself with that he had found something he could excel at.

All the world-conquering spirit he had, and all it led to was a dream that still had yet to lift from the ground.

Toothless had now reached the island, just skimming near inches above the ground. With a few flaps of his greatly enlarged wings, the Night Fury galloped upon the slick grassy field before coming to a stop right at their main camp-of sorts.

Nature often is spared from the ravages of time, and the island was no exception given how little had truly changed since the day this little grove had become their makeshift home. The stream still flowed icy cold water with bits of pine drifting in at times. The rocks still stood with clumps of moss upon their hard surfaces and dark wet spots from the rain, producing a mixture of the oddest scents. The only noticeable difference were the large, messy piles of equipment, failed gadgets, and hunted animals waiting to be skinned and eaten, mostly along the lines of rabbits, squirrels, and fish from the beach.

The Night Fury gave his head a light shake and settled down to give the still too short boy saddled atop him an easier drop to the ground. Hiccup dropped down and gave himself a moment to pull apart his shadowy guise, ripping the scarf from his mouth and neck and pulling away the hood.

At first glance, few would have guessed the boy was only twelve years of age, in fact few would believe he was a child at all. Already his face had the hardened features of a man three times his age, riddled with small cuts and scrapes matching the one on his chin he received through unknown circumstances as an infant. Constant starvation and a childhood of malnourishment had taken away any traces of baby fat on his cheeks, giving the boy a gaunt and sallow look. His skin was an unhealthy pale, and covered with various scars and old burns, stretched tightly against his frail form like taut leather.

His ruined eye: the ghastly, malformed streaks of blistering, glistening red, remained hidden under streaks of stolen gauze, tattered and dirtied, replacing his ripped sleeve. Though hidden, the heavy, lifeless look it gave perfectly matched that of the one still visible and undamaged.

Hiccup tossed his helmet away and discarded the two blades at his sides to the ground quickly after, sitting down on one of the drier rocks he could find. With a solemn look he stared down at the ground, not even watching the almost automatic way Toothless walked over and curled himself around him. Even the scratch on his forehead that Hiccup gave was a near-thoughtless response.

"So what do you think?" He asked. "Keep going?"

If anyone would have told him back when he still lived on Berk how horrid the Outcast's life would be, he wasn't sure how much of it he'd believe. Vikings did have a tendency to exaggerate when it came to explaining things such as life or their exploits. On that he had to give them some credence in making naÃ¯ve children such as him believe biased truths without question. In the end, it wasn't quite as horrific as made out to be, as expected; still, though, it was a nightmare all the same.

As he attempted to that one fateful night, Hiccup continued to steal supplies from the neighboring islands in order to make something of a living. He needed weapons, paper, charcoal, rope, hunting gear, everything to keep him alive and fighting Vikings for as long as possible, everything he could no longer make with his still-evident fear of fire preventing him from making in a forge. Two things he quickly learned, however, were that there were really no advantages to being on either side, and that even with a Night Fury as his vigilant protector, it was no easier getting along.

The number of times they had nearly been captured already went far beyond how far Hiccup could count â€“ why other Vikings were only attentive of him when he was causing trouble, even amidst burning buildings and flying dragons overhead, he would never know. Because the oversized brutes were always so mindful of the weapons they treated like their other children, someone would always spot him dashing out of a smithy with a bag of materials in hand.

The boy had been chased out of burning villages by crowds of murderous Vikings, ducking away from bolas thrown with such force that they would crash through walls and would have easily killed him, and pursued deep into forests where he at times had to crawl into tiny, dank underground tunnels to avoid detection. There had even been a couple of times where he was forced to leap off high cliffs to escape â€“ it would only and always be due to his faithful dragon's speed that he'd live to tell of it.

There were many times when Hiccup and Toothless would stop to rescue dragons that had been caught by bolas or dragons that had been imprisoned in each of the tribes' Kill Rings. Each attempt, despite their successful infiltrations, would lead to an almost immediate confrontation with angry Vikings before he could so much as lift a finger in aid. He only wished he could forget all the times he was but an axe's edge away from a trip to Hell, yet every memory of current and previous rescues was brought back with the same red-faced vehement screams of Vikings chasing him away. Before he knew it, he gained ten times the infamous reputation he had begun to develop back on Berk.

Though Toothless was always there to save him, Hiccup was left with an unavoidable reminder â€“ he needed to learn how to defend himself. With no proper teacher available or willing to work with him and his only memories in terms of battle styles those of one completely unusable, however, Hiccup was left with little option but to train himself. His practice consisted of days simply slashing the air with dummy-weapons ranging over time from thin sticks to heavier sticks to small daggers carelessly tossed aside by Viking children who'd outgrown them. Eventually what started as simply flailing wildly

actually developed into a kind of technique that came purely from a blend of imagination and what he found suited his small, thin frame best.

It was pure luck the day he'd actually come across the perfect blades when swiping from the stocks of the Lava Louts. To an untrained brute's eye, the thin, lightweight blades would be good for little more than decoration or as a razor to clear forests of bodily hair growing in unkempt areas. The young exile found he had put them to much better use, even though he had never needed or ever intended to strike a killing blow when Toothless was much more suited in nature to and had always done so.

But as Hiccup stared into the ever grayed sky above, he once again found himself on familiar ground in terms of thinking where he stood in the game. Were his moves bringing him any closer to his victory, had he just come onto the field, or was he simply not even a player?

That thought stopped his hand cold in the midst of his scratching Toothless' head, which naturally caught the leisurely Night Fury's attention. He cracked open a single eye to see his boy staring wistfully upward, as he tended to do when lost in thought. It had become a thing of regularity in the many passing months they had spent together. He warbled to snap Hiccup back to attention, who offered a sheepish grin in return.

"Sorry bud. I forgot your policy â€“ work for constant pampering." Hiccup chuckled dryly as he continued stroking the dragon's neck. "But, you knowâ€¦ we've been at this for a while now, and it feels like we're still at square one."

Toothless looked incredulously at his young rider as he continued. "Vikings are total jerks, the way they think they can do anything to things they don't likeâ€¦ and yeah, it's kinda sad I had to watch a dragon get brutally maimed to see thatâ€¦ But are we any better? I mean, is it right that we're dealing with them the same way they deal with stuff? What do we really gain from stealing and raiding and killing? What do the dragons even get out of it, come to think about it?"

The dragon gave a frustrated glare, wondering if Hiccup was actually spitting at what they had accomplished. And a number of freed dragons and reduced numbers of trappers out there in the world said they had done a lot. It had earned them quite a reputation, which he had long since noticed got you places in this Barbaric Archipelago. It wasn't much in the grander scheme of things, true, but Toothless would never say it was for nothing. A firm growl to accompany his glare tried to convey this to his boy.

"What? It's true â€“ it's not like we really get anything out of it!"

Toothless gave a small bark back. Suddenly the two found themselves up and staring each other dead in the eyes. **"**_**Since when do you need a big reward? Isn't the satisfaction of knowing a dragon was spared enough for you?"**_ His arguments, which he desperately wished he could tell his young rider in his own words, as always came out in a series of grunts and warbles.

"Toothless, what's wrong with you? Can't a reluctant exile offer a different opinion about things?" Hiccup said. "I swore I'd stand with dragons, and I meant it. I just wish there was a better way to do that!"

"_**Like what? Make friends with them? Show them dragons can be good? Yeah, that's got simple and destined for success scratched all over it."**_He sarcastically drawled. _**"I was there too, you know, I saw what you saw. We can't just ignore what's going on!"**_

"I mean it! I'm tired, Toothlessâ€¦ Can't we justâ€¦ find some way to live peacefully? Somewhere away from-"

"_**Vikings don't give up their kills that easily!"**_

"Geez, if you're gonna make it a full blown fight, at least let me speak. I got enough of being interrupted back home." The last word slipped out before he could recognize its true meaning. Hiccup didn't even notice it, but Toothless did. The Night Fury's eyes narrowed dangerously, a growl pulling at his lips into a snarl.

"_**You're still calling it homeâ€¦ after your own kin nearly killed you?"**_

"What is it with you!? Do you _enjoy this?" _Hiccup asked, his dreary, baggy eyes widened in anger. "I'm not trying to turn the other way, I'm just asking if two wrongs really make a right here! This isn't the first time I've thought this you know!"

That got Toothless' attention. **"**_**Then why are you saying it now? After everything we've been through! It wasn't for nothing, Hiccup, and we have gotten somewhere! You say you're not trying to turn the other way, but it sure sounds like it! Come on what are you really trying to say here?"**_

"Arghâ€¦ you want the truth? Fineâ€¦ I'mâ€¦ I'm scared, all right?"

That one admittance left Toothless at a complete loss for growls or words, and instead took the moment to watch how his boy shivered and held himself, panting heavily. Even old men and withered, starving dragons had more vitality than he did at that moment. It had no force or volume, and yet it still looked as though it took every bit of courage and strength Hiccup had to spit out. "I'm scaredâ€¦ and not just of facing Vikings. You know about myâ€¦ conditionâ€¦"

How could the young dragon forget from the way Hiccup almost instinctively soothed his covered bad eye?

In all the time they had together, all the highs and all the lows, all the victories and the bitter defeats, one thing never changed: Hiccup remained terrified.

Facing down a crew of dragon trappers or Vikings seeking new titles all armed to the teeth was nothing in comparison to the fear Hiccup could feel when he caught sight of fire. The fear -the memories of burning- haunted him even now, lodged within him like a parasite that ate away at him, slowly killing him with each passing day.

Even the slightest of embers was enough to set him off screaming,

offering fair reason to why the boy was always ready to keel over every time a raid had been successfully completed. Sometimes he would just collapse the moment his feet touched the ground, curling up and screaming, flooding out Toothless' pained whines from his ears and all sight from his remaining eye's empty, near-colorless gradient. No living soul could imagine what endless safeguards were needed for a young boy battling with such traumatic emotions and memories to snuff out the utter terror he felt that was unfairly multiplied each time he set out. It had taken awhile and involved many far nearer brushes with death before Hiccup had learned to distract himself to complete his self-imposed missions. But the terror still remained: coming and going, flowing and ebbing like the ocean; it was his constant companion.

How much of Hiccup lived after Toothless had saved him from the burning rubble? The Hiccup of before, back when his life was a little more bearable thanks to Toothless, was not the Hiccup that existed now. When did it happen, and what truly triggered the transformation from the kind yet scared little boy who had befriended a dragon to the bloodstained dragon rider of today?

Maybe I did die in that fire, Hiccup thought to himself. _Maybe Hiccup burned to ashes in that messâ€¦ and I'm just what Toothless pulled out._

A tired chuckle erupted from his lips, madness tinged within at the sick irony. One could not heal from the wounds he had been inflicted with, yet inflicting such wounds onto others earned him nothing. And as ashamed as Toothless was that he didn't recognize the agony his cherished friend went through, he remembered there was more to it than even that.

The dreamsâ€¦

Another unfortunate recurrence, their ambiguous nature setting them words apart from the boy's fears on the scale of frustration. Each dream would always be the same as the last, the same mysterious temple-like room with the same pedestal with the same weapon set in pieces upon it for the child to puzzle out. Hiccup had managed to somehow, amidst all his puzzling, come even further in crafting the weapon, and it had come to the point where it had begun to take some form of completed shape. It was definitely a sword of some kind, with elements of a bow included; imagining what weapon it was meant to be and what its capabilities were brought a sense of youthful excitement to Hiccup. Yet his progress was consistently hindered thanks to a random inclusion of visions:

A massive city with schools of dragons flying between spires.

Twin behemoths rising from pillars of fire and ice.

And nightmarish parallels of dragons, rising from a pale violet mist. The same variety of hordes that he saw that night on that island.

For months it had been a continual cycle of these same mysterious illusions, in addition to those he had seen in that first dream back on Berk. Even the bodiless suit he had seen in the forest had come back to haunt him at various points. Whether all these visions were simply imaginary in nature or actually foreboding to a time in the

near or distant future â€“ neither boy nor dragon could really be certain. It was almost as if each new vision only came to add on to the ones before, like a storybook with gaps in between the chapters read by a continually fading voice.

The terrifying dragons that always called Hiccup's attention, their burning red eyes and visible protrusions of rotted bone, carried a much stronger impact onto whatever aspect of his soul these images were engraved into. These visions of what could easily be seen as draconic undead would always be the first thing that came to his mind whenever he woke up in the morning in chills, and the feeling of being watched made Hiccup nestle closer to Toothless for comfort, even as he desperately tried to forget those searing red eyes and the grinning skulls and the terrible feeling he had that his heart was caught in between one of those creatures' deadly jaws.

These visions had grown so frequent, they had even started striking him without warning in the middle of the day. Hiccup could hardly keep his balance when one such vision struck him at that very moment. He wobbled and gripped his head, trying to stay upright, while Toothless bolted forth to help his friend in any
way.

"Toothâ€¦lessâ€¦" He whispered weakly.

"_**I've got you, Hiccupâ€¦ I'm sorryâ€¦"**_

Hiccup stared bleary-eyed at his companion, while flashes surged into his head. Familiar flashes of, once again, a figure â€“ the possessed suit of armor. This time, it stood standing at the base of a large waterfall against a large stone hill, the cascades of white and dots of grey in stark contrast to its almost radiating ebony form. He couldn't explain how, but he felt as if the surrounding nature was there, somewhere on the island. Even after all the time they had spent there, there were still areas they had yet to explore â€“ Hiccup was never really in the mood for exploring as he was in his younger years. Still, the boy's heart and soul were clenched in the grip of a powerful need to find this hidden location. Butâ€¦

"Where wasâ€¦ that..?"

Blinking twice, he noticed something that wasn't there before. A squirrel, staring straight at him, locking its gaze with his. It was an ordinary woodland squirrel, with the common dusky brown fur, bushy tail and beady eyes. Both Hiccup and Toothless were rendered surprised for a single moment at the tiny creature wagging its tail, yet making no moves otherwise. In hindsight, the two weren't sure what was so surprising â€“ it was just an ordinary squirrel from all given appearances.

"_**Hiccupâ€¦!? W-Where are you going?"**_

The boy was transfixed, unaware to even his dragon's screeching as his legs carried him off in the direction of the squirrel. It began to scurry away, deep into the forest in the opposite direction of the beach, quickly vanishing into the bushes. Hiccup chased after it, somehow managing to keep his eye on it as it darted out from random directions through the thick growth. Left with little choice, Toothless followed, being whacked with one branch and bush after another.

"_Ah, come on! Hallucinations I can take, but now he's chasing after squirrels! Well, at least he's following something visible this time!"_

Hiccup began to pant heavily, the exhaustion of the day's activities finally managing to catch up with him. His lungs felt cold and empty, lacking in air he needed at that moment, while his legs felt like heavy iron weights. Even his eyelids began to droop heavily, yet he locked onto the still-noticeable squirrel like a beacon of light in a dark, floral tunnel. He wasn't sure how, and he had every reason to doubt his feelings, but he couldn't help but feel the squirrel was leading him to something he needed. An answer to his doubts.

'_What are we doing? What are we really hoping to accomplish?'_

'_How are we any different from the Vikings? No, there has to be a better way!'_

'_I need to do more! I wanna do more! To save the dragons, to protect Toothless!'_

'_There has to beâ€¦ something MORE!'_

* * *

><p>What may only have been minutes felt like days of running through the shrubbery until Hiccup finally heard the crashing of water ahead. The end of the forest was a welcome sight to his weary eyes as he cleared the last few trees, shutting his eyes and holding his buckling knees to catch his breath. He found it infuriatingly laughable that after all the years of training himself to fight giants of men and carry out the dangerous work he and Toothless did, he still lacked somewhat in the required stamina. But looking up, all his frustration and fatigue vanished in an instant.<p>

There before him, was the massive waterfall he saw, much larger in scope than he might have thought. The sound, akin in volume to a crashing tidal wave or a cacophony of dragons' roars, pounded his eardrums. Endless gallons poured down with powerful force, down to numerous rushing streams of water that gleamed like the purest crystal, which flowed past numerous rocks that darted across the surface. The interconnecting webs of water stretched in numerous directions, through trees and bushes, all connecting back to a large pool with an elevated stone set in the center.

Mist hung on the surfaces of the interconnected streams, obscuring everything in Hiccup's sight with the ever-shifting swirls of thick fog. It clung to his slender form like a wet, heavy blanket, somehow managing to seep into his leathers without difficulty.

Hiccup shivered as goose bumps rose on his exposed skin, and suddenly he felt vulnerable without Toothless besides him. But still, swallowing the brief moment of fear, Hiccup stepped forward, he could feel his weight give as the spongy ground gave way ever so slightly. Hiccup paused immediately, his lone good eye narrowed dangerously, pondering on his next move. The urge to continue forward was still in him, like an unsuitable itch that he couldn't scratch, but the reminder of hidden dangers past that looming fog kept him locked in

place.

Toothless charged through the trees, landing at Hiccup's side with a graceful and mighty pounce that did his deadly species justice. With a shake of his head, he angrily turned to Hiccup.

"_**Hiccup, what the heck are you doing? You know I don't like it when you run off like-"**_

Cautiously and unaware of Toothless' arrival, Hiccup stepped forward, gazing in all directions as he walked into the almost mystical oasis. The mists seemed to part and vanish as he continued to approach before reforming, as if they opened some door into an unseen realm like the place in his dreams. Toothless maintained a close distance behind, grumbling while keeping a much more vigilant watch for danger.

And there it was.

Hiccup couldn't help but gasp when it came into focus. "You!"

The mists gave way to a barely visible silhouette enshrouded before them, a thin but strong frame belonging to no one the boy had ever seen in his lifetime, yet familiar all at once. Impressively, when he turned the mists followed the fluid motion of his body, like the eye that gathered winds in hurricanes and snowstorms. Upon facing them completely, all the bog that covered the area had completely disappeared, leaving the boy with a full view of his form.

Indeed, it was him, or rather, it: the same empty suit of strange armor he had seen wandering through the shadowy forest years ago. Exposed to stronger light, the leather crafting of the suit became much more evident to Hiccup. It was wrapped from head to toe in belts, colored as black as the scales of the Night Fury beside him and wore sturdy gauntlets and boots that looked to be able to survive an axe blow or two. The spiked mask he wore was foreboding in appearance, largely due to there being nothing behind it.

Toothless growled warily, catching Hiccup's attention. "Wait, Toothless, you can see him..?"

"_**Of course! Any human dressed like that during the day would be hard to miss!"**_ Toothless rolled his eyes barking.

"_It's been some time, boyâ€¦ or should I call you dragon rider?"_

Both boy and dragon startled back at what was apparently the sound of its voice. It reverberated through the air and echoed like the sound of grating metal, yet not unpleasant at all. It didn't use actual words as humans did, or even growls and barks like the dragons; its message instead carried into the minds of the pair. It was fascinating and disturbing all at once.

"_So young, and yet never before have I seen such a powerful spirit. You areâ€¦ quite strongâ€¦"_

"W-Wellâ€¦ uhâ€¦ I-I-I guess no one's ever said that about me beforeâ€¦"

"_**And now we're talking to ghost armorâ€¦ Life with you cannot get any more hecticâ€¦"**_

The boy ignored his dragon's quip that came off as a mere grumble. "Youâ€¦ what are you? W-Why did you show up in the woods? Do you know about those weird dreams I've been having? Do-"

The figure had been stepping forward as Hiccup went off on a spree of questions, yet as it passed him, a forceful gust ran throughout his body, like a stone spire bracing against a tidal wave. The invisible robe of power trailing after the armor left Hiccup dazed, his voice completely silenced. The child gripped his own throat in inexplicable fear he might have been stripped of his own soul instantly.

"_Such a small seedâ€¦" _The armor continued. "_â€¦Yet the promise of what grew insideâ€¦ It seems fate took to raise it."_

"_**Raised it? You make it sound like my boy went through that-that hell for a reason! And pinning it on fate of all things!?"**_

"Youâ€¦ you do know something. Don't you?" Both the figure and Toothless turned to Hiccup's timid voice, barely audible amidst the sounds of the island. "You know, right? If there's anythingâ€¦ more I can do? It feels like I'm getting close to something, but am I really?"

A raw, desperate anticipation rose within the wayward young vigilante, waiting for answers he could not know the enigmatic armor possessed. Yet it felt as though he was standing on the precipice of something greater, something he could not be more sure of now that he had been searching for a true purpose.

The fear, the doubt, the dreams, it had all become much too routine, and he was not content just aimlessly holding down for the moment it would all come to pass. If he could be given even the slightest hint as to what it was, what it all meant, or what might be comingâ€¦

"_You wish to know about the creatures, do you not?"_

Hiccup gasped. "The creatures? You mean those freaky-looking dragons?"

"_Years have passed, and yet the seal remains undone, the void released. The senseless conflict between humans and dragons, a mere prelude to a greater calamity."_ The figure slowly turned its ethereal gaze upward. _"Meanwhile, by invisible guiding hands, the pieces assemble, ever unaware of their own part in the board's formationâ€¦ Those beasts, their existence tips the balance of nature."_

"What are you saying? They're not your garden-variety dragons or something?"

Toothless' defensive growls grew louder and more aggravated by the minute. _**"Give me a break! Hiccup, you're seriously buying into this? Why should we believe anything this thing saysâ€¦ into our brains?"**_

"_Are you not curious as well?" _The figure asked Toothless, whose eyes broke open in shock.

"_**Y-You can understand me?"**_

"Toothless?"

"_I understand much, such as where the two of you go from here. The creatures, if you can seek them outâ€¦"_

Hiccup added in as much as he could despite the lapse in communication between the three of them. "Then, we'll know what comes next..?"

"_It is not only the future you may wish to know more of. Much like these streams, time and fate move constantly forward. Stones caught in the flow must follow eternally, but understanding the source can guide you to the correct currents."_

"Okay, I'll ignore the effects that had on my bladder." Hiccup sarcastically joked.

"_However, should you happen to find them, you may be forced to take an undesirable course of action. Perhaps blood may soil your hands after all, young dragon riderâ€¦"_

"_**Wait, are you saying..!" **_Toothless growled.

"Ahâ€¦ no. N-No way. Are you telling me I'll have to kill them!?" Hiccup shouted, his curiosity giving way to anger. "Forget it! If I wanted to be a dragon slayer, I'd have stayed on that stupid rock and bent over backwards for those jerks!"

"_You'd turn away from the purpose, the hero's path you seek?"_

"How does killing an innocent creature make me a hero!? That's the kind of backwards thinking Vikings are notorious for! And I'm no Viking!"

The armor turned to him, the expression it possibly sought to convey anyone's guess. _"Very well, it is your decision. Individuals have less control over their lives' course than they think, yet more than certain others think. But they will appear regardlessâ€¦ at the site of the beginning and the end for youâ€¦"_

"The beginningâ€¦ and the end..?"

It spared them no second glance or word as it turned away, its form slowly fading into nothing until finally it was gone from sight completely. All that remained in that now drained cove were a boy and his dragon, both confused, frustrated, angry, disturbedâ€¦

But more than anything, curious.

* * *

><p>So, mysterious, right?

**As you can see, things have been set into motion. The next chapter will bring another good dose of action, suspense, and maybe a little

angst as well, cause I'm finding myself to be good at that.**

Anyway, until that moment comes, go ahead and check out 'Hiccup's New Life (Film Version)' by MODDenial. I've become something of a beta reader for that story, and it's based off of 'The New Life.' It should be interesting enough, especially now that the writer has declared his intent to make it more of a "watching the cinematic fanfiction" kind of story.

Anyway, as always, review, favorite, follow! Let's get this story up to the thousands! And once again thanks to NinjaRiderWriter for his help.

15. Chapter 15

Okay, I'm feeling good that I was able to get this new chapter up so soon instead of keeping you waiting for months on end. Trust me, I understand your frustration since none of my favorite stories around here are updating.

I know I said I wanted to keep things secret, but with some complaining that I'm just confusing them with all the cryptic stuff going on in my story, I've compromised to explain a few things. I'll just answer as much as I can without spoiling.

HawkTooth**: I'll say this â€“ in this story, Dragon Riders are going to have a bit more of a sacred origin. This story will be taking from certain elements in Norse Mythology, specifically those not commonly seen in HTTYD stories, but I don't know if I'll be putting in extensive features on the other realms. They might appear somewhat in the second arc, but with what I already have going, that's just going to end up adding more content. Just know that what he saw in his dreams alludes to something more familiar as far as canon goes.**

nhkosoy**: They did meet the armored figure in real life, and this meeting alludes to what will be happening further in the story.**

EagleDragon15**: Keep reading, pal. You'll get some good fight out of Hiccup. And this is a message to everyone â€“ I know my stuff so far is depressing as well as confusing, but just bear with it.**

CartoonLoverBecky**: Nothing too big, they just ran into a disembodied suit of armor that told them what they have to do next. Hiccup wants some answers as to what he's seeing and this thing's telling him to find out for himself.**

sondrex76**: Thanks so much â€“ I'm glad you enjoyed it. And yes, Hiccup will get over his fear of fire, eventually. At this point, what remains of the arc is pretty much for the sake of character development â€“ it cements who and what he's going to be in the rest of the story. **

**Everyone else, thanks as always for your continued support. At this point, we're approaching the big climax of the first arc â€“ which as of now I have determined to be about 21 to 22 chapters in length.

It's not going to be easy to read through, but your patience and persistence will wear off. In the meantime, enjoy this new chapter.**

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* * *

><p>It was crazy. No, it was stupid. No, it was crazy and stupid.

That's what Toothless told him, in his doting dragon-ish way, and though he didn't say it, that's what Hiccup thought too. When they put together the cryptic clue left behind by their equally cryptic visitor.

The place of the beginning and the end for him.

It took a good, hard look at himself in the pond in that misty cove, staring right at the reflection of the tattered robes, the chipped blades, the scratches, the burns and the miserable young body they all stuck to. What created that haggard variation â€“ what turned a hopeful starry-eyed boy seeking adventure and greatness into an exiled husk of humanity doing what he alone considered acts of valor? What killed the light in his eyes as brutally as Vikings killed their hated enemies, the dragons?

And that's when it hit him. When that sickening night he'd placed so much effort into forgetting sprang up into his consciousness with merciless fountains of force. Memories of cruel laughter and faces splattered in blood flooded through making his own run ice cold.

Even when his career in rescuing dragons to spare them humans' vicious reaches for glory began, he'd always managed to stay away from that island. _Just keep away from that place_, that little voice in the back of Hiccup's mind kept telling him, _don't go near them and you won't have to deal with that again. _He'd marked it with bright red banners in his mind's eye, ever reminding him of its status as a veritable forbidden zone.

The Maniacal Tribe was whom this particular island served as home to, Hiccup discovered during one of his jobs. Apparently, their insanity in killing dragons and calling themselves saviors of the world was a defining trait among these people, though Hiccup could never say he'd heard of them before when his father had been drilling tribal politics into his head. In fact, their long line of chiefs had for centuries promoted the delusion amongst the Maniacals that their actions served a higher purpose compared to the other tribes, that they were warriors of a higher degree and calling. Naturally, he supposed it would make doing business with them a headache worth at least a dozen ice blocks, hence the secrecy.

When the raids increased in severity and provisions started to become scarce throughout the archipelago, the Maniacal Tribe decreed to the others that as 'heroes of destiny,' they needed or deserved more. Naturally the other tribes, sick of their ages of hot air, turned them down or even laughed in their faces, something the arrogant Maniacals did not take well. They were actually the first to conduct raids against the other tribes to steal food and supplies, and had no

qualms in killing people or kidnapping women and children in the process, triggering the north-wide struggle amongst the various Vikings.

Other than that, they were your typical Viking bastards stuck in dark times, still in the practice of keeping slaves and using archaic punishments such as the Blood Eagle. Only tribes such as the Outcasts or the Hysterics joined them in that regard as far as Hiccup knew, but having seen firsthand the horrors these people were capable of made them especially menacing compared to simple rumors of the others. A tribe that looked so similar to his old home on the surface yet housed such monsters... the means to describe it for the young vagrant was simply beyond all words.

Riding on his reluctant dragon, carried by steadily stronger wingbeats, Hiccup was carried to that very island where he would supposedly be granted the direction he desired. Right as the sun began to set, hiding many of the islands features in shadow with a lining of gold highlighting them. Even from their high-up vantage point, the two could see that warning torches were already being erected in preparation for any sudden dragon attacks.

Hiccup closed his one good eye and held his head down, exhaling heavily through his nose to shut out both the sight of flickering flames and the memories. Instead he focused on the words of the disembodied armor, its unsaid promise.

'â€¦ _Where the two of you go from hereâ€¦ the creatures, if you can seek them outâ€¦'_

He opened his eyes and stared down, still exhaling and giving an unsure gulp.

'_However, should you happen to find them, you may be forced to take an undesirable course of actionâ€¦_ _but they will appear regardlessâ€¦ at the site of the beginning and the end for youâ€¦_'

"I've gotta knowâ€¦ I-I can't turn from thisâ€¦" Hiccup muttered unsurely.

But as he turned Toothless down to touch the island, he was only half-surprised to find that the Night Fury wouldn't budge from where he hovered in the sky.

"Umâ€¦ Toothlessâ€¦ let's get going. Impending greater destinyâ€¦ right down thereâ€¦"

_**"Yeah, along with nutjob Vikings ready to stick everything down to their dinner knives in you!" **_Toothless growled, shaking his head. _**"I'll be struck by lightning before I let you go down there!"**_

"Toothless, we've discussed this! I'm not satisfied anymore just pulling off random rescue missions."

"_**And what do you think risking your life like this is going to change for you!?"**_

"I don't wanna have to argue about this anymore, you stubborn dragon.

Now let's. Get. Moving!" Hiccup did his best to shove his dragon's head down and steer him towards the island, with as much strength as his ragged body would allow. But Toothless would not budge an inch, looking back towards his boy rather exasperated in fact, as he bounced up and down to stir action.

"Will you. Just. Land!?"

Toothless stared deadpanned at him. _**"Oh, I know we're both gonna regret this."**_ With a heavy wingbeat, the Night Fury surged down like a bolt of lightning towards the island. Hiccup braced himself as much as he could, given the mere second he had prior to the black dragon's move. Gates of clouds dispersed in their wake, as they dove with such speed the two would have appeared as a blur, and crashed down into the forest, away from the eyes who would have perceived it so.

With a nauseous groan, Hiccup managed to remove himself from Toothless' back, but the moment he set his feet upon the ground vertigo overcame him. The world swirled and threated to turn upside down before managed only a few shaky steps off the back of his Night Fury before collapsing to the ground in nausea. "Warn me next time you're gonna do thatâ€¦"

"_**Consider that a penalty."**_

As much as he felt like puking up all his meager meals for the past three months, Hiccup shakily got to his feet and made his way to the edge of the forest. Gripping onto the scratchy bark of the nearest tree and hiding behind it, Hiccup cast his gaze out towards the village of the Maniacals.

In semblance to standard Viking culture and attitude, nothing had changed since the last time he was here, from what he could tell of the scene. The array of buildings and houses sprawled out across the area varied in detail based on what he could recall back then, some surviving but most newly constructed. Little grass could be seen next to the arid-looking earth dotted with stone pathways, and even that terrain was overshadowed by the numerous weapons storages and armaments scattered across the village grounds. As expected, the area was practically crawling with fanatic Vikings, toting maces, axes, swords, clearly ready for any kind of fight. The boy had to wonder with a small degree of unexpected smugness if they were just as prepared for him as they were for any dragons.

Hiccup dared to take a glance at the torches providing warning light above, flickering in the pits atop the long posts. The moment he did, his vision began to blacken and his pulse raced and thundered in his eardrums. The boy tore his eyes away from the alluring flames and clutched onto the tree trunk for dear life, panting and sweating heavily while gripping onto his left eye. Toothless raced over to his side and gave him little comforting nuzzles with his snout to ease his nerves.

"I still can't do it. All this time and I still can't do itâ€¦"

"_**Easy, Hiccup. You're okayâ€¦ you're okayâ€¦" **_Toothless warbled gently.

Toothless led him into the safe element of darkness, deep into the thick wood, where they both belonged. From their sanctuary of shadows no one could pin them down or mock how damaged they were, and they could act in small revolution accordingly. It was always that way, for as long as Hiccup could remember, how the dark was his only refuge, how his own shadow was his only friend, and ironically enough, how a dragon named after the black evening sky was his sole companion now. If destiny played a role in any of where he was or what he was doing, the boy could spare a piece of drama and say he was fated to live in darkness and employ it as his sword and shield.

It was decided then â€“ the plan would be to wait until the dead of night until whatever was supposed to happen would. With hours remaining until that time, Hiccup sat with Toothless curled tightly around him, and fell into a deep slumber. The last thought he had before slipping away as he looked to his ever-faithful partner:

"_I'm sorry, Toothless. But I need to knowâ€¦"_

* * *

><p>With a glimmer of light that slowly expanded and consumed his senses, Hiccup shifted into focus, finding himself in a place so very familiar and yet still so unknown to him.<p>

Once again, he was in the white room, supported by pillars with the table in front of him with the still un-completed weapon set out before him. The stone was the same, the scenery outside was the same, everything completely the same as ever. Though, no matter how many times he would suddenly appear in that alien rotunda, the feeling of pressure and cringes of fear traveling throughout his body would never fade, nor the lump in his throat that made it as though his voice was robbed from him. All that was taken from him was replaced with a thousand questions that it almost seemed likely would never find their answers.

What is this place?

Why do I keep coming here?

What is it I'm supposed to do?

With little option otherwise as to how to whittle the time until his subconscious was pulled back, Hiccup returned to his self-assigned task of completing the weapon. Even broken and incomplete, what he had assembled so far from the hilt to the guard was artistry in itself. The decoration and detail carved into each particular piece utterly breathtaking, while the components resembling dragons struck a chord of awe within him. Even the collapsible segments of blade were masterfully crafted, and the bowstrings tightly tied they seemed almost like woven steel. Hiccup could only imagine what pride could be taken in wielding a weapon of such beauty and no doubt required an expert warrior's hand to make full use of its capabilities.

The rush of excitement alone was all he needed to continue working on it, puzzling out every detail and fitting together pieces with pure luck. Like most times, it all seemed to begin as a silent activity just constructing the sword, picturing all the ways it could be used

in battle. But the anxious feeling of waiting for something or simply feeling oppressed never seemed to wane, no matter how engrossed the boy soon came to be.

Out of the corner of his eye, Hiccup spotted something outside the room at that moment. Some blurry silhouette of a figure standing what appeared miles away. In some common mix of shock and curiosity for him, the boy ran to try and peer out into the curtain of cloud outside.

"Is that a deer?"

The creature he saw had a form that matched that of a deer, with a crown of antlers like tree branches extending out and upward. It looked to have a powerful body, standing with no small sense of nobility as its head was raised high. What caught the boy's attention, was how it appeared to have its head turned his way, perhaps as though it were looking straight at him; its gleaming eyes cut through the clouds and shone with majestic power, transfixing him and leaving him frozen in place as if to confirm his theory.

Hiccup stared for what seemed like ages at the deer, ever afraid of that light and how it broke through his shadows of protection, though powerless to turn away. He felt like a wild animal exposed, desperately waiting for whatever came next; he was truly growing sick of that, being left on a hook expecting something and nothing all at once. He wished he could just go back to his safe and happy darkness, in fact preferring to spend the rest of his life there.
Untilâ€¦

Dripâ€¦

A sound, quiet and calming but world-shattering all at the same time, broke through.

Dripâ€¦

A drop of water, the volume akin to a dragon's roar in the midst of unbearable and soothing silence.

"_The Godsâ€¦ do not protect this worldâ€¦"_

Hiccup startled. An entire sentence, carried into his mind and soul with the quickness of another drop. The atmosphere dulled out and faded away was he looked still to the deer, who he thought may have been the one to speak.

Drip...

"_They who revel in the Heavens, the whole of nature at their commandâ€¦ they are but observers."_

"The Godsâ€¦ don't protect this world..?"

Dripâ€¦

"_This trial, bearing their nameâ€¦ is for the enlightened ones soon to blossom. They who reach for truth, standing at the border between mortal and divineâ€¦"_

Dripâ€¦

"_Saviorsâ€¦ of a world with waning hopeâ€¦"_

* * *

><p>Hiccup awoke with a jolt, drenched in sweat and panting heavily as he usually did after such intense dreams. The blood flowing through his veins felt as though it were beginning to freeze and his surroundings began to blur in his vision. A couple of nervous licks from Toothless slowly but surely brought him back to reality.<p>

"Toothlessâ€¦ Wait, is it time already?"

No sooner than the question was released from his lips and he bolted back up did his memories flood with recollections of his current position. The boy grabbed onto the same tree at the edge of the village, and sure enough, the sun was gone and the sky was now covered in a blanket of pure black with several stars dotting it. The flames' golden hues stood brighter in contrast against the night, leaving them as the only light with which to see the dangerously equipped Vikings patrolling the grounds below.

Hiccup turned to his dragon without a moment's hesitation. "Okay, bud. Showtime."

"_**Yeah, but what's playing?"**_ Toothless grumbled with an eye roll.

The two crept around the nearest building as fast and as stealthily as they could. Hiccup could not say he felt as confident as his black-scaled guardian in terms of being able to move undetected, considering how close he came to capture or death each time he infiltrated an island. But shadows once again served as their safe zone â€“ by sticking close to the areas where light couldn't reach, by hiding behind barrels, sheds, and houses, and bolting off as soon as watchmen were far from sight, they managed to remain in the clear. All the while, the two kept their eyes to the skies above for any sign of dragons, Hiccup being sure to avoid staring at the abundant watch blazes, and hope the warning passed onto them would come nowhere close to reality.

By the time they had managed to stray a fair deal towards the edge of the village, the boy spirits began to rise. "I've gotta say, bud, things are looking good. Nothing's happened yet, but I think this is the longest I've gone without being caught. I'd say-"

Any further word the young dragon rider had to spare was cut off almost permanently by a dagger suddenly shot from out of nowhere. It lodged itself in a house wall merely half an inch away from the bony flesh of his neck, turned a ghostly pale along with the rest of him. It was well-kept from the looks of it, polished to a perfect gleam and carrying ornate design, much like the weapon in his dream but to a lesser degree. Toothless turned with the same swiftness and growled in the direction of where the dagger came from.

"_**-we're so bustedâ€¦"**_ The dragon jokingly finished.

"Well, well, wellâ€¦ isn't this a treat?"

The voice came from out of nowhere, though it rang a disturbingly familiar bell in Hiccup's ears despite the lack of intensity. From out of the shadows, a figure emerged. Hiccup backed away, nervous and anxious as he recognized the shadow.

It was her. The girl from before.

She had aged over time, but Hiccup hadn't forgotten her, and probably never would. Those eyes of hers that locked with his at first glance, so filled with hate and devoid of compassion, marked a permanent place in the pages of his memory. That apparent venom of hers towards her world's impure nature would have pressed Hiccup to quiver under its ferocity had he not been made of stronger stuff.

Her hair, darker than a raven's feathers, was longer than before. It curled down past her shoulders, tickling the nape of her back, with each bundle shining in the torchlight like sparkling onyx. She wore a worn leather tunic that was entirely covered in various straps that wrapped around her slender form. Daggers of all shapes and sizes bristled from the straps, like porcupine quills they covered her, though he did spy one empty holster. Hiccup, despite his fear and apprehension, couldn't help but think of those knives as beautiful.

She also had an axe strapped to her back. _That_ was new. She hadn't had one before, and judging by how the wickedly sharp metal gleamed in the torchlight, Hiccup guessed that it had only just been freshly forged.A pelt of wolf fur was wrapped tightly around her waist and leather boots covered her lower half. Her hazel eyes struck a chord within Hiccup, and looked to have the desire and intention of striking more; nothing was conveyed in those near soulless eyes other than the express intent to kill what was directly in front of her. The girl gazed at them placing a hand on her hip and smirking coldly in the most aggravating way.

"The infamous Dragon Riderâ€¦ come to pay our island another visit."Her tone was dripping with sheer contempt.

"You!" Hiccupwanted to scream, but common sense made him whisper it with as much venom that he could muster. "You're the girl from back then! The one who got approached by that Nadder!"

"Got 'attacked', you mean." The girl bluntly stated, irritating Hiccup. "And I have a name, for your information. It's Erika."

"Yeesh, someone's parents obviously wanted a boyâ€¦"

The girl's face twisted into an annoyed scowl. The way her thin lips adapted into such a proficient expression of annoyance made it apparent that she did a lot of scowling."Funny. Folks could say the same thing about you, shrimp." 'Erika' stated. "I was wondering when you and your '_pet'_ were going to come out of hidingâ€¦"

Hiccup glared at how she stated the word 'pet' with such vitriol and fury, though it was quickly turned to shock. "Wait, you knew we were in the forest?"

"Well, I can't take that much credit â€“ truth is, I just happened to

catch a glimpse of you taking your nappy-poo before coming in. Gotta say, the sight of you and your pet dragon cuddled up all cutesy-cozy-like wasâ€¦ what're the words? Oh yeah, _incredibly disgusting_â€¦"

Toothless bared his fangs and claws, his slit eyes focused on the child and silently begging for the chance to rip her throat apart at a moment's notice or blast her to ash. All he needed was for Hiccup to say the word and the wicked girl was as good as a corpse, though he'd have little trouble waiting and contemplating what other ways he could end her miserable existence. The dragon couldn't say it was the first time their bond, incomprehensible as it was to this world of beasts in human guise, was mocked in such a way. But the end result would always be the same, regardless of the circumstances: death would teach them the proper lesson to hold their arrogant tongues.

Hiccup, however, wanted to take a different approach. Killing her would do them no good, but if he could keep the clearly trained child talking, a chance to escape would hopefully present itself. "Yeah, well, hardcore and bloody isn't my thing, contrary to certain unpopular claimâ€¦" he paused, hoping that the girl was melodramatic enough to keep talking and ranting to him, rather than scream and alert her tribesmen. "So, what've you been up to these days?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Erika smirked even greater than before. "I've been enlisted in dragon training. Won't be long now 'till I'll be shooting those demons out of the sky along with the others."

Hiccup's eyes cracked open in surprise. "Wait, you're in dragon training!? But you don't look any older than me!"

From what he remembered of basic Viking society, and much of his knowledge had begun to fade in the passing years alone, dragon training had strict requirements. One such standard was age â€“ only at around the age of at least 14 or 15 would Viking children be considered healthy enough, agile enough, coordinated enough, and most importantly strong enough, to survive the brutal regiments offered. As the name suggested, it implied training with actual dragons, starved and imprisoned to near madness, simply trying to survive while attempting to learn their statistics in a real-life situation. Since it was a rite of passage required of all children, the years prior would consist mainly of developing the physical strength needed to endure. Putting aside the issue of his lack of appropriate attributes even with that time, the bottom line was that eligibility for a child of his years was impossible. So how could this girl, to which the same criteria must have applied, be given the chance to risk her life just preparing for war?

"I'm guessing those islands you hit ran by a different set of rules." Erika stated, almost seeming to read his mind. "We Maniacals do things a little differently. Killing dragons is more than our culture â€“ it's our destiny, bred into us from the moment we come into this world, to be followed 'till we draw our final breaths."

"Destiny?" Hiccup choked out, shocked. "That's what you people call it? _Destiny?_ Throwing children into a hellish regime and hoping that they survive until they just one dayâ€¦ just, just can't take it anymore!?"

He had known that the Maniacals were, well, maniacal_. _But this was just insane. This entire tribe was _insane_.

"The moment a child has the strength to wield a weapon is the moment they set on their fated path! That's what our chief says â€“ 'accept the will of the divine and become a beacon of hope for the world plagued by discord and entropy!'"

"Oh, of all the insane-!"

"You're one to talk about insanity, traitor!" She quickly drew one of the daggers attached to her form and pointed it straight between his eyes. "I've been waiting a long time for this. Ever since you and your pet flew off with both your tails between your legs, I've been hoping for a chance to kill you myself!"

Hiccup had to step back when the dagger drew close enough to draw a trickle of blood from his neck. In effect, Toothless growled even louder, no longer sure he could wait for his boy's command. _**"You're really pushing it now, girl! Drop the blade and I might leave your corpse with one limb attached!"**_

"What was that?"

"Sounded like a dragon!"

"The devils are getting' sneakier! It's comin' from over here!"

From over in the distance, the sounds of angry Vikings were calling out. Once again, it seemed Hiccup had made an error in judgment with these people, and now who knew how things were going to turn out.

Erika's smirk shrunk down into a cold, deadly smile.

"But then again, I'm not too picky. Either way, you're getting what's coming to youâ€¦" She turned to the direction of the voices, leaving Hiccup tense. And then she _screamed_."Over here! It's the Dragon Rider! Capture him!"

It didn't even seem that the Vikings in the area had to pause, because suddenly Hiccup could hear the thundering sounds of booted feet drawing closer, of jostled weapons and shields. And he knew that he was caught. Erica's cruel smile never changed as she watched, though it did seem to grow wider.

Rough hands suddenly grabbed him, holding him so tight that Hiccup cried out in pain. He could hear yelling, or maybe it was cheering, from all around him. Besides him, he could hear Toothless wailing as Vikings surrounded the Night Fury, two men were standing on his back, while another wrapped his brutish arms around the dragon's snout, preventing him from using his fire. Something heavy came crashing down against Hiccup's back, and he was pinned to the ground, his bruised and burned face smashed into the dirt and rocks.

As much as both boy and dragon desperately struggled, neither could even hope to overpower the heavy Vikings. His lungs swelled with pressure from the lack of air and his vision began to fade once more, but Hiccup was only knocked out at last from a heavy blow to the head

from one of the Vikings on top of him.

The last thing he heard was the shrieks of Toothless and the sinister chuckling of the Vikings before passing out completely.

* * *

><p>Hiccup barely awoke hours later to the sound of angry jeers and dark sounding drumbeats in ceremonial tune with one another. The twin cacophonies merged with one another, pressing down on his tiny form just like the crushing weight of those Vikings' callous hands. Once again he felt as though he couldn't move or breathe; his limbs felt like rusted iron, limp and suspended in the air.<p>

Little by little, his vision returned to focus, coming face to face with hordes of Vikings surrounding him in every direction, all screaming every kind of insult at him. His surroundings matched that of the Kill Ring back on Berk, a place of combat that here was more hallowed and ceremonial in nature. The area was rounded, with a large dome of crude metal bars intersecting one another to create a barrier separating the arena and the spectators. The iron bars were hammered into the stone walling, which had long since blackened and charred from years of exposure to dragon fire. The walls looked as though they had been in a constant state of disrepair, with odd patches of dried thatch and hardened clay to fill in holes. Hiccup could spy claw marks against the blackened rock; long, thin lines of scratched stone that rose high on the walls, as though some poor beast had tried, and failed, to claw its way out of the Ring.

Within the Ring itself, were various columns of chiseled stone. Hiccup did not recognize the type, but the stone did not appear to be normal. Unlike the broken walls, darkened by soot, the columns' clean stone gleamed in an almost ethereal shine, carefully preserved and maintained. The columns were tall and imposing, casting dark shadows that stretched across the floor; Hiccup tried to find the top of the columns, but couldn't spy where the stone ended as though it touched the skies, its pinnacle hidden in the darkness of the heavens.

Crude drawings were scrawled across its rounded curves; odd looking, dark red runes seemed to bleed out of the very stone. The runes seemed to spiral higher and higher, passing the iron bars and rising into the sky, Hiccup couldn't see where they ended. Alongside the foreign ruins were pictures stained in various hues of ink. Brutal depictions of the violent dismemberment of dragons surrounded by ink-stained Viking figures, the depiction so carefully painted that one could see the agony of each dragon's demise, and the glee of the ink warriors' faces.

Large braziers were placed around the metal dome, the metal bars casting wicked shadows against the ground while the shadow of the columns seemed to stretch evermore in its powerful light. Torches dotted the area, running alongside the iron bars. The room sweltered with the intense heat, the air stifled and heavy as it ensnared the room's occupants with its blistering grip.

Fire.

Hiccup saw the fire, and something within him began to panic. It felt as though something was trying to rip out of his chest, hammering against his ribcage in a vain attempt of flight. His breathing

hitched, his throat clogged, and already he could feel his body begin to burn and char away.

It was such a fickle thing, fire. It was so bright and warm, so welcoming that it seemed almost teasing, and harmless to the ignorant observer, but to Hiccupâ€¦ he recognized its fearsome power. Beneath its gentle light was a beast of destruction and never ending hunger. And the beast had seen him, had recognized him; its warmth suffocated him, as though its gentle heat had hands that strangled his throat, searing his thin form with such intensity it sent chills down his spine.

His mind seemed to shut down, his thoughts slowing down until they were nothing more than muddled flickers of conscious thought. Any attempt to shake of its fuzzy grip left the boy even more addled and confused. His heart still raced, beating against his chest as though to break free. As his mind slowed, and his heart gained rapidity, the dark plethora of fear that lingered in the boy's heart and memories began to consume him, burrowing into his skin and searing through his veins.

The room itself was oppressing him, playing on his fears and doubts, his own inner darkness, through both the source of that fear and its own sacred nature. For the first time, darkness was no safe haven, no form of protection, only a weakness.

All that escaped his notice was his own position. Bound upon a raised platform of wood, flanked by two wooden posts that were wound tightly with thick, iron chains that connected to the heavy manacles clasped to his forearms. He didn't even attempt to move, not when he was bound with near unbreakable shackles that were pulled back so that the boy was constantly kneeling, arms pulled uncomfortably as his bare chest was exposed before the screaming crowds. Not even Toothless, strapped down and muzzled onto the floor of the podium directly below him could cry out. Hiccup could not see the utter agony reflected in the Night Fury's eyes, unable to even look upon his friend and provide the little comfort he could.

All around him, Vikings surrounded him, barely illuminated in the torchlight. From the mightiest warriors and shield maidens to the old and grayed, to the greenhorn recruits and the youngest of children; everyone in the tribe was present. Everyone was here for a show, for an execution. Their armor and weapons gleamed against the darkness, their hands raised into meaty fists to swing in the air, their screams and jeers mixed in with great vitriol.

"Death to the Dragon Rider!"

"Die, unholy Loki scum!"

"Kill him! Kill him and his pet dragon!"

These many scattered chants and others like them were carried all across the arena, craving the sight of the boy and dragon rent to pieces. People pounded their fists and weapons along the steel and rock everywhere, sending massive tremors through the Night Fury's body and greatly disorienting him. Noise tended to affect a dragon greatly in battle, but here it seemed to be for no other purpose than to make their pair suffer.

The massive carved wood doors that faced both Hiccup and Toothless swung open with a mighty crash, letting in the chilling air that caused the many flames to sway and flicker. With what seemed to be the air of a god at his back, the crowd hushed as in entered a large man, larger than many of the others. He sported an aged grey beard that grew past his protruding waist, various trinkets and ornaments weaved within his hair. Instead of a tunic, he wore finely woven silk robes with numerous inscriptions and lines upon them that Hiccup did not understand, but realized they were the same as the runes emblazoned across the columns. A belt made of a simple rope was tied tightly to his waistline, holding in a presumably massive gut. He reminded Hiccup of the priests that worshipped the gods; there was the same air of the mystic surrounding the man that was reminiscent of the silent power of the holy men and even Gothi.

As he slowly made his way into the area, towards the bounded rider and dragon, the Vikings suddenly became quiet, hushed into silence by the impressive figure. As one, the horde of spectators bowed their heads in submission, their heads bowed so low Hiccup swore he could hear spines cracking from the effort.

"ALL HAIL CHIEF ASMUND THE OVERSEER!" All the Vikings cried, welcoming their leader with cries of elation and adoration.

The holy chief raised his hand to pause them in their respect. "People of the Maniacal Tribe, we of the realm of Midgard as well as our brothers and sisters who feast well in the halls of Valhalla are gathered here in our hundreds to recognize a heinous crime." His massive fist loosened, one pudgy finger pointed accusingly at the bounded Hiccup. His eyes, gleaming so passionately that they seemed to weld into the boy's soul, stared at the defeated rider with glee. "This child, this heathen, has been found guilty of sacrilegious treason of the highest degree, of falling unto allegiance with the very beasts who drive our world to the brink of destruction!"

The crowd screamed at the man's words, and more jeers and taunts were thrown against the bound boy, a dark and wicked flame in their eyes ignited by religious fervor and Chief Asmund's message. The chief did nothing to quell their fury, but rather let it continue. And suddenly, Hiccup understood this man: despite his already large stature, Chief Asmund seemed to be a larger than life figure before the people of this tribe. He appeared almost divine, with his silver tongue and his powerful stature.

"The sentence for such an inexcusable act â€“ death by blood eagle!"

This time all in attendance cheered, especially as from the same open doors came Vikings armed with large poleaxes, the very weapons designed to tear the victim's back open so that their very bones could be torn apart. They marched slowly downwards, booted feet stomping against the ground as one; the mighty sound of war drums followed their steps so that it appeared as though every movement brought forth the sound of thunder.

They did not wear the usual Viking attire of thick wool and mismatched metal plates, but rather the same silken robes as Asmund, though they were bare of any intricate runes. Their faces were dark and solemn, devoid of any mercy or reason, immersed in their role as bringers of just death, and stopped right at the sides of the chief

with their executory weapons in front, still as statues. Toothless flailed as hard as he could after catching the glint of the weapons, practically screaming themselves for the drawing of blood, but his restraints only seemed to grow tighter the more he fought back.

Asmund slowly walked up the steps until his feet were right at Toothless's snout. Without warning, the esteemed ruler of the Maniacals kicked the dragon right in the nose, jolting Toothless back only slightly as bound as he was. The chief gave a small sadistic grin at the dragon before turning his gaze to Hiccup, taking in no small sense of satisfaction from the child's utter helplessness.

"The time has come boy â€“ you stand now upon the brink of the abyss. May you be discarded to the depths of Hell as you truly appear." He whispered in Hiccup's barely functioning ear, and turned to the crowd again. "The daughter of Loki, ruler of the world below, shall bear witness to this child as we shall now, stripped of any cloak that shields his wretched form from our eyes!"

Hiccup had only snapped back to reality just as the chief's massive hand made a grab for the bandages that covered his ruined eye, tearing them off in one dramatic motion. The crowd gasped in horror and disgust as his damaged face was exposed for all the tribe to see, but before long some of the more sadistic ones began to chuckle and cackle at his horrific disfiguration, as if his pain were some source of entertainment. The laughter was as apparent as a thunderclap to the boy; their mocking tones branding into his skin like a burning poker, and Hiccup only shut his eyes trying to shut out all the loud mutterings came from all around him, more painful than any arrow or axe blow could ever be.

"Will you look at that face? Gods above, I've never seen anything so ghastlyâ€¦"

"Dear Odin, he's hideous!"

"There's a mug you can't look at on a full stomach."

"That's not a face that even a mother could love!"

"Don't know what's more gruesome, that kid's eye or what his corpse'll end up lookin' like!"

"Mommy, look at him! Isn't he a total freak?"

"Serves the brat right. That's what he gets for consorting with dragons!"

Their voices enveloped him, taunting him. For the moment, all the fear left his body as a great, terrible shame overcame him; distant memories of his life on Berk became clear again, and his constant companion back then, loathing, welcomed him back with open arms. He hated this. He hated _them._

Asmund grabbed Hiccup's face close, forcing him to look in terror directly at the smirking chief. "My stars, boy, even I didn't think you were this gruesome." He said chuckling.

Let them laugh, Hiccup though as his fearful look slowly turned to one of defiant anger, both chin and form rising in stubborn defiance. Laughter and words from the mouths of these vile people amounted to nothing more than testaments to ignorance, so they spouted whatever they want, when they could never understand what this scar meant or where it came from. It was a symbol, an ever-present reminder that the creature in front of him and those all around him were the source of evil in the world.

If such a mark was assumed to define him as an ally to those who suffered at their hand, a savior to what monsters defined monsters in all their hypocritical arrogance, then so be it. Darkness was where he hid for safety, keeping all his secrets concealed â€“ it had been as such for so very long. But this night had already proven to be a moment of change, and as such it was the first time Hiccup could wear such his scar proudly.

The chief noticed his rising strength and answered with a harsh backhanded slap to the face, enough to draw blood from him. "The traitor has shown no remorse, no intent to recant. So shall it be â€“ the blades, which shall carve through his tainted form, shall be as the voice of the Gods. His final moments their judgment!"

"Judgment!" The Vikings cried out as one, their voices mixing into a single echoing unity of elation and hatred.

"Judgment!" They continued to cry it out.

The chief raised his arms, as though to grab the crowd into an embrace. "Let this be a reminder to all here never to stray from the path of justice, from the great destiny the Gods have assigned to us!" Asmund widened his stance, hands still outstretched, and hands from the crowd reached out, as though to grasp onto him. "We are the Chosen Ones, born with the whispers of their wishes in our hearts. They demand of us to free this world from the tyranny of these unholy beasts and all those who stand with them! In their name, we shall deliver this tainted Midgard ultimate salvation!"

Roaring in approval, the whole of the Maniacal Tribe's ferocious shouts threatened to shatter the walls. The boy still kneeling down had remembered how they preached as to being heroes when they brutally massacred that Nadder, but to think they had believed in it so much. The thought that such ridiculous arrogance had totally consumed their views made their cheers all the more sickening to the boy.

In a sudden moment of internal silence, though, a surge of memory struck him. The deer in his dream, when it had told him that the Gods do not protect this world.

Was there some truth to it all, then? Were the Gods simply content to leave this world and its inhabitants to its fate? The deer had said they were merely observers, but it might have been easier to imagine them turning a blind eye to the prolonging of this war and all the countless deaths that came with it. Despite their inaction, Hiccup was left to question if it might truly be their will that humans take up arms, or that dragons should truly be eliminated.

Either the Gods hated everyone, or they just really hated

Hiccup.

"By the will of the Gods of Asgard, we shall uphold our duty and send this spawn of Helheim back where he belongs!" Asmund grabbed Hiccup by the hair and thrust him down, then signaled for the two executioners to take their place to begin the Blood Eagle. Watching the humans prepare for the bloody deed, Toothless intensified his struggle, finally managing to break the leather muzzle through sheer force of will.

"_**HICCUP!"**_

The boy whose name was barked braced himself for the worst, submitting to powerlessness before what may have been destiny after all.

But just as the axe blade were about to come down and hack at his flesh, another gust of wind blew through. The wind was foul and smelled of the foulest amalgamation of blood and bone, blasting through with the force of a hurricane. All the torches simultaneously blew out, leaving the room almost pitch black save for the little moonlight from outside. People began to gasp and panic, squirming in their seats or rising to their feet and darting their heads around for some obvious explanation.

Suddenly, the room darkened even more as what little moonlight touch the arena dimmed, its once brilliant rays now dull and transparent, the room filled with a deep violet fog sifting in, granting a dim luminescence so people could see the mass hysteria visible on their neighbors' faces. Children cried and clung to their parents, while warriors raised their axes and gripped them with such tight and trembling hands they might have snapped the handles in two. In every corner of the arena, there seemed to exist a deep malevolence carried in the fog that snaked around every form there: a miasma that carried a will from which only true despair and terror could come.

An ominous feeling rose in both Hiccup and Toothless' guts as they looked to one another as best they could.

The boy heard Erika's voice call out from somewhere in the stands. "Chief! What's going on here!?"

"Calm down, everyone! Most certainly, it's more of this boy's heathen trickery!" Asmund called out to pacify the crowds.

"But he's not even doing anything!" Erika cried. "Dragon or not, how could a weak kid like him control the weather like this?"

At Erika's words, the terrified crowd began to stir. Uneasy mutterings began, slowly gaining in both number and volume as neighbors turned to one another to try and make sense of such mystic, terrible power.

"That's right! What's goin' on, here!?"

"That boy can't be doin' this!"

"Have we angered the Gods in some way?"

Asmund looked around, noticing his hold on his people was slowly

slipping to anxiety; in quickness, he raised his hands to restore control. "Hold, everyone! We must remain calm â€“ take strength in one another as you would the-"

Asmund's voice cut off suddenly. The elder man's face, worn down by age, seemed to slacken as he suddenly looked at his chest.

A hole had appeared, and within it was a single tendril the size of a sword. Everyone, including those down in the arena, just stared at it in aghast shock, the chief's garb of beautiful white, silken robes turned crimson by the dribbles of blood sliding down the fine material. Asmund looked down at the stained tendril jutting right from the middle of his chest, wiggling and squirming in lively fashion, feeling a draining sensation as he continued to stare. He choked, his voice strangled and feeble, suddenly too weak to even cry out, left with only the strength to continue staring in transfixed horror at the bloodied appendage.

All in attendance flinched in silent horror as the lone appendage suddenly burst out with a barrage of spines, skewering as many holes as the hairs on his chin, each one spouting showers of blood down. Spikes ran through everything from his eyes to his hands, one even jutting through his own mouth. The tendril slowly hoisted him up, his limp and bloodied form held up for all to see like some gory effigy, and tossed him away like a ragdoll, retracting its spikes in the process, as Vikings shrieked uncontrollably.

"OH, GODS!"

"HE'S DEAD! THE CHIEF IS DEAD!"

"WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM!? WHO KILLED THE CHIEF!?"

"ARE THE DRAGONS HERE!?"

Hiccup spared the lifeless glass eyes of the expired chief a single terrified glance before looking back to the entrance where the spike originated from. It returned to the fog like a viper slinking into the bushes, leaving a room full of anxious people to await its source. Moments later, footsteps pounded across the ground, a dragon's steps as far as everyone present was familiar with, even as abnormally slow and uneven they sounded to the ears of the better-trained. But only the boy bound, shackled and questioning everything he currently saw and heard could have possibly known what came next.

A ghoul-like beast, exactly matching a Deadly Nadder in everything from body shape to tail length to the point some might have guessed it a subspecies. Though its skin was dyed ash black, flecks and streaks of rot and decay specking across its hide, its wings were tattered and punctured, and it wore a pale armor of bone over its upper body, a helmet-looking configuration of said armor over empty eye holes with a burning crimson glow inside.

One look at the creature and most wondered from the pulse of fear racing through them that their own mortal souls might have been shoved from their bodies before bouncing back in. The demonic creature growled in an unearthly manner, cold, dry fog leaking from between its devastated jaws. Stepping forward, it stood directly in front of the frozen Hiccup and Toothless.

Hiccup could admit now. The dark was as much enemy as it was friend.

* * *

><p>That about wraps this chapter up. The next one is the big climax on the island of the Maniacals. After that, I'll post up the new chapter of The New Life. Be glad to know I've now got an idea as to where I want to go with it beyond the point I was stuck at.

**If anybody has any more questions, I will answer them to the best of my ability and as much as I will allow, and feel free to post any predictions you might have, too. I know I said this is just a hobby, but I do want to create a good story for all of you, and I am thankful for all this warm reception I've been receiving on my first story here. **

A bit of a side note for those who don't know, new episodes for Race to the Edge will premiere in January. I'll try to get the next chapter up before the end of the year just to curb you over until then.

As always, review, favorite, follow. We're close to some big milestones in the stats here.

Thanks once again to NinjaRiderWriter for editing.

16. Chapter 16

Well, here we are. How fitting that the last new chapter I promised comes on the last day of the year. Thanks to everyone for getting this story up to 500+ favorites and 600+ follows.

Now then, I won't waste too much time here. I'll just get right into answering some reviews.

MODdenial**: No problem. From what I've seen, you're starting to go into my story, right? Anyway, as for Hiccup's face, think 'Zuko scar' from Avatar. He got it from when a piece of burning debris smacked him right in the eye. As for the lack of detail, maybe this will be a little better.**

DannyPhantom619**: Well, Hiccup was kinda assassin-esque back in Chapter 14. That's what I plan to build off of.
**

dracologistmaster**: You'd win that bet. These 'dragons' aren't too particular about taking sides, as you'll find out eventually.**

KaliAnn**: Well, creating a mental picture is what I really try to aim for with my writing. Although at some points, it may not always be a good thing.**

DragonPancakes673**: Glad you liked it, I guess.**

Warrior Nun**: Don't feel bad about wanting baddies to get their

just desserts, I say. And glad you're enjoying it.
**

HawkTooth**: I don't know if you could fully say they're part of Norse mythology, more like 'scary story' stuff. But yes, I will be taking inspiration from a lot of stuff not commonly seen, as I said before. And I'm glad you find it interesting. Hopefully others share your sentiment.**

Lauren S**: In this order: Yes, somewhere in-between, and no.**

Dark Ghost coc**: He will come back to Berk, but whether or not he takes his revenge â€“ well, let's just say he'll have bigger things to worry about.**

To be honest, there was another review that I wanted to answer here, as viciously worded as it was, before it just turned into a Hiccup-bash session. I'm not going to mention names â€“ you know who you are, and I gave you a chance to explain but you didn't. Maybe I'm not really one to talk, as much as I have problems with Hiccstrid (yeah, not really Astrid, the relationship in general, which is just driving me crazy), but at least I don't go fouling up someone else's review sections about it.

The point is, these comments, as brutal as they are, affect me because they target not just the character but also how I've interpreted him. I get it, not everybody likes a certain person, and I don't expect to get compliments all the time, but at the very least, whatever criticism you give should try and help me better the story. I had a similar problem with MattAShine, but he openly admitted he was just upset over something and we were able to discuss it reasonably.

**All I can say is what I've said before, things will get better for the kid, but if your opinion of him and this story is this low already, then clearly nothing I do is going to change your view of things. I really don't know what to say to you and all the other readers who find themselves growing impatient and feel the need to blow up and take your frustrations out like that. **

This chapter will be another dark one, to give fair warning. Again, read at your own risk.

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* * *

><p>'I-Is that a dragon?'

That was Hiccup's first and only coherent thought staring at the deformed beast in front of him, snarling with the foulest of air escaping its rotted jaws. Terror struck deep within his heart as he desperately tried to back away from the beast, tugging uselessly at the chains that kept him bound in a failed attempt to break free.

It slowly stalked forward and leveled its haunting gaze towards Hiccup. A horrid sight to behold indeed, even after Chief Asmund's grisly demise.

It was an animate manifestation of atrophy and misery, each silent step it took a sign it was not meant to exist in this world. Its corroded hide stretched tightly over its massive form with vicious openings alongside its side. Its once luminescent scales had dulled significantly, their gem-like state had faded away into petrified stone. Its wings were in tatters, with large gaping tears in the taut hide that were long infected and eating away at its cold flesh; it would have been a miracle if the thing was capable of flight. As it drew closer, Hiccup gagged at the pungent scent of rot, his eyes watering as he spied a few remaining strips of rotting flesh clinging to its exposed jagged ribs and narrow spikes erupting from its back and tail, congealed blood half dry and staining the cracked white bone.

Its eyes, the same glowing red eyes that plagued his dreams, locked with Hiccup's own, imprisoning the boy in a prison within his own soul where air, sound and color were all but drained away. The very visage of it struck at his fears in a way more grotesquely and heavily than fire's heated coils ever could.

Everything about it, from its half-decayed state to its dull scales to its rotting spikes, made the beast appear dead as a corpse, and yet it walked and moved as though something dark, something _vile_, had breathed life back into it.

But as he beheld its unnatural form, a pang of familiarity struck within him. Memories he'd long tried to viciously erase from his head snaked in once again. What had once been repressed by the boy, its contents once so horrific and brutal that the boy had shunned it, came back to the front of his mind, once hazy snippets of flashing memory became clear and whole. The shackled boy could hear every shriek crying for mercy and gush of blood once again from that night he saw heroism in its darkest form.

'It's that Nadder..! The one those Vikingsâ€¦ killedâ€¦'

How was such a thing possible? He had seen it die, torn to shreds under the ferocity of its arrogant attackers. No other way to say it â€“ the creature had _died_.

That fact in itself set off horns of dread in every corner of Hiccup's mind, snapping him back to this ghastly reality. An innocent creature that had been killed years ago was standing before him now, a perverted embodiment of evil and despair in all appearance. It seemed so wrong, looking at its demonic form near silhouetted against the creeping fog at their feet, to see something so horrendous and ghastly guised as a creature that he so greatly cherishedâ€¦

This wasn't the creature he'd wanted to protect. Not anymore.

Shrieks of panic from two species filled his ears and brought his attention towards both the fearful masses and his dragon struggling for freedom close by. Driven by both will and terror all at once, Hiccup struggled for freedom in just the same way Toothless did.

The clashing and rattling of metal bars surrounded them as the Maniacals, whipped into frenzy by the death of their chief. With their hammers and blades, they broke down the fences before they began swarming like a horde of insects through every crack and

opening. The cacophonous screams of anger with veins of maddened grief running in every tone filled the ears of both prisoners, driving Toothless into a fit of pain as he bowed his head low and kept his ear flaps near flattened to block out the sound.

Practically set upon the guillotine, the warped dragon's head was bowed down low, ready for an attack, even offering another soulless roar in opposition. A Viking at the front of the tribe's vengeful charge raised his blade, the glint of its tip aimed directly at the cracked and oozing scaly flesh of its elongated neck, and was brought down.

In a clean slice, the head of the beast shifted and slid down to the ground, severed from its body, the bloody red glow in its empty eye socket dimming until it vanished completely. The rest of its wretched form followed quickly after, collapsing in a lifeless heap upon the ground. The rotted smell of decay emitted from the creature's flesh only increased in magnitude now that it had been reduced to a second carcass.

"For Chief Asmund!"

"We've done it!"

"Wretched beast! Destiny has dealt you this fate!"

The stadium erupted in this vengeful chorus of victory in every corner, raising their blades to the blocked sky in honor of their late leader. Though not a single smile could be singled out upon any one of their faces, they nonetheless carried that sense of predetermined triumph amongst them. Those who did not share in the uproarious jubilee of the warriors stood in silence, staring at their deceased chief's lifeless corpse with sorrowful and piteous gazes.

In between enraged victory and solemn loss, Hiccup justâ€¦ watched. He felt nothing, no emotion whatsoever. Whatever this doubly fallen creature was, he had seen it take a life, as his own draconic companion did so many times before. The life in question was of a man who drilled into the heads of others that they were on some noble, predetermined quest to eliminate an entire species. What emotions could he feel, and who would he be right to mourn?

For the first time in some time, the vigilante child felt vulnerable, completely cold. As he had been when the terror of fire gripped at his heart and then callously discarded it from his grip.

"Wait, something's not right!" A voice from the crowd, recognized by Hiccup to be Erika's, sounded. "Look!"

Heeding her command, the Maniacals and Hiccup's faces went into pale-white, stone-set shock. Strands of some black substance - whatever it was, no one could be sure â€“ slowly came from the severed pieces, like unraveling yarn, in billowing clumps of porous, black smoke.

The smoke was unlike anything he had ever seen; it billowed and spiraled and gleamed an oily texture that seemed to almost shine in the ethereal moonlight. The thin strands of pure darkness began to

lengthen, slowly drifting through the air, as they began to pierce into the various severed parts of the defeated corpse. Like a needle and thread, the smoke weaved in and out with swift precision, knitting new, whole organs and muscles, while wayward bones began to settle back in their original places.

Crack.

A broken tibia, snapped in half by the boot of a Viking, melded back together and was shoved back in place.

Crack!

Its broken-in ribcage, the tips serrated and its sides chipped, began to settle back in place as phantom smoke solidified into new bone.

Cr-ack!

The beast's tattered wings that had been splintered by a Viking war hammer, began to snap back into original, form, small splinters of bone rising from the stone floor back into the delicate wing bones.

Cr-ack!

More bones forced together.

Cr-ack!

An entire leg revitalized. Its ruined arms healed.

Cr-ack!

It went on and on, over and over again. An endless rendition of broken bone becoming whole, of torn flesh knitting itself back together, of a corpse torn asunder by the ferocity of the Maniacal tribe slowly piecing itself back together.

To the crowd of appalled and horrified Vikings, it looked as if a reverse motion of the creature's innards being torn apart by bare hand. In those moments, no one dared to speak, the nightmarish occurrence robbing them of their voices, leaving the air filled with nothing but the sounds of sickening crunching sounds.

The now-reformed organs were quickly wrapped in a veil of darkened smoke and tattered hide; there was the sickening sounds of stretching skin and innards jostled around. The beast then, to everyone's growing confusion and dread, began to rise up to its feet again. Its head, still half-torn off from the beast's neck and at an unnatural angle, slowly began to rotate, the vertebrae of its half-bent spine popping back up. The constant series of _pops_ became almost too much to bear as the bones of the skeleton were broken, reformed and forced back into place.

As soon as the head locked in place, the lifeless red glow returned to its eye sockets, completing its ghastly revival with a violent and phantasmal roar in which it flared every part of its truly undead body. The Vikings, once so assured and confident with promises of just fate backing them, screamed in terror unlike anything they had

known before.

"What the hellâ€¦ what the bloody HELL!"

The dragon took a step forward, the sound of its clawed foot hitting the stone floor like the crash of thunder amidst what was now panicked shrieking. It inhaled deeply, taking in any sense of purity or light that might have been found on that island along with the remainder of its enemies' defiant courage into its chest. All that was absorbed into the dark dragon's maw was quickly released as a jet of shadowy vapor, wrapped around a thin, yet concentrated stream of azure blue fire.

"Look out!" One Viking shouted in warning.

But it was too late.

No more nightmarish and gory was the evil parody of the dragon itself than what its stream of fire did to its victims. From the flame came no familiar heat, no blistering warmth that all had encountered before, but rather a terrifying, sharp coldness. Each one felt the unnatural chill flood their bodies as the flame engulfed the ground and touched them all, vitality and strength seeping from their bodies. Their massive, bear sized limbs and guts began to shrivel, their lengthy beards and heads of hair withered and fell to the ground in droves, and their skins turned to a sickly pale.

Time and malady together worked through that guise of ethereal flame and destroyed them little by little, their voices and screams silenced by death. Their healthy forms quickly withered away until all that remained of the warriors were brittle soot-stained bones welded together from the fire, keeping the frame together and standing, their arms still raised up to shield themselves.

The curtain of smoke was risen, or blown away, exposing the demise of the Vikings for all to see. Rather than fall into heaps, the crisped bones of the dead simply disintegrated into a fine powder; ash and dust blown away by the soft winds as the remnants crumbled to the floor in heaping piles.

Cries of sorrow and shrieks of terror rumbled from the mouths of women and men alike, everyone began to push and shove their neighbor in a vain attempt to flee; the fire that had burned in their hearts to kill and maim sizzled out like dying embers confronted with winter's unrelenting frost. The panicked masses crammed into every available exit that wasn't guarded by the otherworldly monster, so much so that not a one was able to get out. Their large forms, packed against one another so tightly, ironically blocked their last hope for survival.

Suddenly, the world seemed to explode in a sea of blue flame. Around them, surrounding the arena, massive bolts and globs of azure flame rained down upon the arena, crashing through the thick, metal casting, melting it easily. Molten iron drizzled down upon the Vikings, who cried out in agony as their armor crumbled and their skin sizzled and blistered.

Those Vikings, however, were the lucky ones. Those who were unfortunate to be caught in the blasts of the cobalt, blue flames met the same fate as the earlier batch of Vikings; their strong, able

bodies withered away into empty husks that disintegrated into dust and ash within moments, their screams cut off.

The thick stonewalls of the Kill Ring exploded, large chunks of debris flying and crashing into those who still survived. From the gaps crawled out a plethora of similar aberrant creatures, deviants of many of the common breeds of dragons in the same way the first was. Gronkles, Hideous Zipplebacks, and the ever dangerous Monstrous Nightmare, they all swarmed the Ring, their forms just as decayed and terrifying as the Nadder. Ruined wings, decayed bony forms, dulled scales and scars scattered across their flanks, a majority of them sported missing teeth, and a few even sported broken horns.

Together, the flock of common dragon breeds seemed to inhale. Hiccup could see the lungs of the Zippleback from where its right flank sported a large hole, building up the slowly visible cluster of infernal flames inside. And all at once the dragons exhaled bursts of the bright blue flame as one.

The fires condensed within one another, forming a massive wave of eerie destruction. It engulfed a score of Maniacals, reducing their bodies to ash. Those who attempted to cower behind the massive columns that were etched with runes, as though the apparent holy relict could protect them such evil, met the same means. The towering columns, weakened from the explosions and the unnatural fire, imploded at the base, its foundation crumbling. The columns fell, smashing those unfortunate who were too slow to move out of the way.

Amidst the unfolding chaos, Toothless saw his chance. The chains holding his form down had become brittle after being exposed to the flame of the dark Nadder. Giving one last struggle, he managed to yank off the muzzle strapped onto him and hurriedly blasted away the chains.

"Hiccup!"

The Night Fury rushed up to his friend and shot away the chains holding him just as he did his own. The boy crumbled in a near lifeless heap to the ground before standing up once more on wobbly knees, grasping onto his dragon's head for balance.

"T-Toothless. Whatâ€¦ what is that thing..?" Hiccup muttered dizzily.

"Hey, I'd tell you if I had any clue myself." Toothless warbled back in his dragon tongue. **_"All I know is we're dead dirt if we stay here any longer."_**

The meaning behind his dragon's naturally encrypted words came clear enough to him as he scrambled onto his back. Toothless madly dashed the moment his boy was secure, avoiding blasts from dragons and swipes from Vikings who had noticed their attempt at escape. Like drops of water seeping through the cracks, they ran under bodies and leapt atop heads, until Toothless took off through an open hole in the roof.

"Dear Godsâ€¦" Was all Hiccup could say once the outside came into view.

The once star-streaked sky had been darkened, the million points of light above dimmed and dulled until there was no trace; instead, a malevolent vortex of black and purple clouds spun high above them, as though the emergence of the undead had brought forth a storm of darkness that served as a harbinger of utter destruction. It looked as though the worst hurricane in history was soon to come down and devastate the archipelago, yet not a single wind blew past.

Churning the shadowy maelstrom instead was an army of the same malevolent dragon imitations, gliding in an ever continuing circle, almost swimming through the air like fish through a sea of emptiness on trails of obsidian wisps of smoke. It seemed that as more and more dragons appeared, the blackish, purple clouds spun faster and faster, forming the beginning of a massive funnel cloud. And yet, despite the closeness, Hiccup and Toothless felt no winds, no gales, not even the softest of breezes. The air around them was stagnant. Dead.

The few remaining Maniacals who had managed to escape all made for their places: the women and children to their own Great Hall for safety or to their own homes where they locked the doors. The men assumed their positions after having scrambled all the way to the armory to pick up any weapons they could. Others took their places at the ballistae and catapults placed around the island and aimed carefully at the silhouettes in the sky of a denser black than even the Night Fury's fabled hide.

As if waiting for them to prepare themselves, the evil dragons furled up their wings and swooped down from the ebony sky with speed so fast that the air whistled. Even Toothless would have been hard-pressed to match the level of speed they displayed.

To everyone's short-lived surprise, the dragons did not unfurl their wings to pull up before hitting the ground, but instead angled their rapidly descending bodies to various targets, specifically the catapults and ballistae. Their rotten forms smashed into everything from armament to earth, exploding in a magnificent burst of dark flame and bone, destroying all that came into the radius of their impacts. Each spot struck appeared as if blackened, skeletal veins appeared upon that spot, signifying some sickness in the land. Any warriors unfortunate enough to be close by suffered the same fate as the first warriors, succumbing to that sickness and dissolving into piles of ash.

The boy and Night Fury pair themselves only narrowly dodged their dead-on course, though even in the course of the slip stream rushing past them as Toothless flapped away, they could both still feel vibrations of that malignant, terrible aura, no different than if they had been struck down themselves.

From that point on, the chaos only increased tenfold. To an untrained or naÃ¯ve eye, it would have looked the same as any other raid. The warriors charged forth with righteous battle cries, battling with fist and steel alike, aiming for their next target and the glory their head would elicit. However, the 'dragons' had the overwhelming other hand, each one among their vile ranks taking ten lives without even coming close to losing their own. No matter how many times some righteous Maniacal charged forth and slashed away a limb or bashed their heads in, a second later and they would regenerate with a twist of the bones and a burst of scales and smoke, and retaliate with

means far more barbaric.

Warriors and shield-maidens were treated no different than beef served on the dinner table, chopped up into millions of pieces in ways too sickening to describe. Despite their attempts and their ferocity, the Maniacals were slowly picked off one by one by enemies that just wouldn't stay dead.

"Those guys are getting slaughteredâ€¦" Hiccup couldn't help but make the observation vocal from their seat in the air.

"Wish I could say they had it coming." Toothless growled.
"But this is just plain overkill."

They landed on a nearby house and just watched the attacking horde swoop down and the Maniacals raise up their shields and charge in, to no avail. The Viking army was unbelievably beginning to wane in their confidence as, even when they seemed to have the upper hand against the beasts, they would still mindlessly charge in and allow themselves to be maimed or their limbs severed. Several groups would at times gang up on a single human and almost play with them before ending their lives. Butâ€¦

"Wait a minuteâ€¦"

"What's wrong, Hiccup?"

"They'reâ€¦ just fighting?"

"Uh, yeah...? Isn't that what dragons usually do on raids?" Toothless gave a confused look and warble to match.

"No, don't you get it, bud? They're not going for the food stores!" Hiccup gasped. "It's been at least an hour and I haven't seen even one of these things take as much as a single sheep or chicken!"

Any simple-minded and discriminatory observation a Viking might have made about them, dragons were just dragons. Animals: a part of nature. And part of being an animal was a primal, instinctive drive to survive, which so happened to include gathering food from whatever source they could find it. Whatever amount, no matter how paltry, that any of the tribes might have saved up, the dragons would always try to make a grab of it and escape to wherever out on the seas their nest might have been. Hiccup had made such an observation during his many years on the island, simply watching the winged creatures live and adapt to whatever circumstances nature herself threw their way.

And yet here were these foul creatures, almost deathly focused instead on the utter destruction of their human enemies, matters such as food and self-preservation be damned. Within those terrible red eyes was nothing that belonged in the form of a once-living being, nothing but an all-consuming lust for human blood and an empty yet overwhelming desire for destruction. There was nothing resembling a conscience or anything that would make one believe them to be sentient, like true dragons. There was no indication that underneath the thick aura of decay and death was a sentient being, much less a creature that Hiccup knew to be beautiful and loving. Inside this horrid demon of the next world was a soul devoid of whatever gave it a true place upon this earth, left with only a desire

forâ€¦

"â€¦Revenge. They want revenge." Hiccup muttered.

Looking up to the spiral in the sky, Hiccup could clearly envision the centuries of warfare that had led them to their current point in history. In the course of war, acts of hatred and bigotry beget hatred, each taken life triggering tragedies one after another in a cycle of revenge. Human kills dragon, dragon kills human â€“ it went on and on with no end even in the sight of any mystic who claimed to convene with the Gods.

Seeing these fiends, analyzing their behavior devoid of all sense of reason even by animals' standards, a merciless desire for vengeance was all it could be defined as. Denial of the basic nature of these creatures, one and all, or what that nature was reduced to, was all but impossible now for the child. Evil was a matter of pure perception to one who was simply watching the world at work.

Any further musings were cut off as the boy was tackled by something from the right, sending both him and his mysterious assailant yelling and rolling down the side of the roof, Toothless' screech trailing behind them. Hiccup cried out as his body slammed into the ground, his head smacking against a protruding rock and his vision blurred crimson. His hand rose to touch the back of his throbbing head and he winced as he felt his fingers go slick with blood.

Before he could even blink, a pair of hands wrapped around his throat and began to throttle him. Gagging, Hiccup tried to wrestle the hands off of him, but they gripped with an iron-tight strength. The hands were small, with soft callouses around the joints, covered in grime, soot and even blood, and were very, very cold.

Squinting his eyes, he could make out Erika's panicked and enraged face. The one responsible for his capture looked terrible. Strands of dark black hair sticking out in every direction and several raven-dark locks stuck to the sweat covering her face and neck. Her face, mouth set in a wicked snarl of utter hatred and loathing, sported several large, forming bruises like wayward freckles with small gashes scattered across her cheeks that slowly bled tiny rivulets of red down her face like bloody tears.

"You! Call off your beasts, NOW!" She shrieked.

Struggling to find his voice as all the air was being squeezed out of him, Hiccup eventually managed to speak. "W-What are you...?"

"DON'T PLAY DUMB, YOU SICK BASTARD!" She screamed mere inches from his face. "If this is your idea of a game, then you better knock it off right now, or these demons can watch as I pop your head like a wart!"

"I-I thought youâ€¦ didn't believe I wasâ€¦ controlling themâ€¦"

"That was before I saw you conveniently slip away while innocent people were running for their lives from your pet!"

"Giveâ€¦ meâ€¦ a BREAK!" Hiccup found the strength reserves needed to grab the Viking child's wrists and pry her steeled grip from his

neck. He threw her onto the ground and coughed heavily as sweet air refilled his lungs. "Still selling all that 'innocent' crap. And you think I'm the one playing a game here?"

"How DARE YOU!"

"â€¦I don't care if you're some Asgard-sent hero or an eager trainee with her first dagger! All you're doing is killing and taking names! What do you think you really know about anything? You're the one playing around here!"

"What do you know, you heathen brat!? My parents, my siblings, my friendsâ€¦ everyone I've ever known and loved was killed by thoseâ€¦ those monsters!" The Viking girl screamed with tears beginning to fill her eyes. "How could I possibly treat this like a game!?"

"Don't ask me, because you're doing it anyway!" Hiccup shrieked back. The girl's admission to all she had lost might have struck some chord of remorse inside of him, but right now he was too angered and flustered to care or act upon it. "One minute you're happily playing the frightened, tragic victim, the next you're some hero of prophecy. You, this whole tribe â€“ you're just playing around with whatever twisted notion you're calling destiny!"

"Shut up! Shut your mouth!" She more violently screamed, shaking her head. "I don't need a lecture from some good-for-nothing traitor!"

"At least I'm trying to understand something and make a difference!"

"The only thing you need to understand is that the Maniacal Tribe are going to wipe you and your lecherous pets off the face of Midgard!" The girl reached for her axe strapped behind her slowly, making sure her enemy's attention was diverted. "As our men told you, that's what heroes are supposed to do!"

"Heh, I get it nowâ€¦" Hiccup gave a soft chuckle. "What, think coming here and killing me is gonna make you that big-shot hero? Think what you do to me is going to accomplish anything!?"

"We're the heroes around here! You're the one fighting on the wrong side!"

Hiccup glared fiercely at her before dropping his eyes to the ground with a weary shake of his head. "Even now, I have to wonder where talk like that comes from. Clearly you're no different from that sobbing brat I met years back, regardless of what any scary old weapon you're trying to pull on me says!"

Erika's eyes widened slightly at her deceptive play being revealed, but recovered quickly out of new disregard for subtlety. "Yeah, well you can just-"

A growl suddenly sounded from behind her, cutting off her words along with letting cold, foul air pass from behind her. She dared not turn around, knowing too well what was waiting behind her, yet curiosity or inbred brazen fearlessness prompted her to act otherwise. The terrified face she wore, with beads of cold sweat running down her

face, never faded away as she did. It felt as though eons passed before she finally came face to face with her unknown killer-to-be.

How fitting it was the very Nadder from the beginning, the one her cowardly self-preservation had allowed to die.

"Ahâ€¦ mamaâ€¦ papaâ€¦"

Thousands of flashbacks came into her head, each one evoking mixed emotions of joy, grief, and anger. Of the happy life she led with her family before her 'destiny' became known to her in the form of their torched and bitten corpses strewn across the floor. Slowly they passed in sight of her memory, flooding her senses â€“ especially her sight â€“ in an attempt to soothe her soul from what was no doubt to come. Faster and faster they sped until figures and scenes were no longer visible, going along with her racing heartbeat so quickly her mind might have exploded from the sheer rush of it all, untilâ€¦

â€¦It all came to a stop. All went black, as the beast lunged and tore her head from her body. Fountains of blood sprayed from the severed neck of the girl as her lifeless, useless vessel now fell. The beast swallowed her head like a light snack, and Hiccup watched as it slid down to its stomach by the lump in its throat.

It had just hit bottom when the evil beast turned its attention towards Hiccup, who scrambled back in panic. It didn't take an expert to know that it had set its sights upon him, ready to finish him in the same way it had Erika. In utter paralysis, Hiccup just stared at the beast for what seemed like an eternity, until he slowly found his hand raising up to touch its snout.

It was a futile attempt at best, but Hiccup prayed beyond any hope that his peaceful gesture might soothe the monster as it had Toothless. The gesture of trust that had won a Night Fury and countless dragons after to his side may just be what would have been needed to reach out to a possibly still-existing heart beneath a fog of hate and revenge. He'd wanted to bet that maybe he'd just been fighting with the wrong weapons, and love could be used one more time.

But the bone-chilling roar of the Nadder and the gases building up and spilling from its jaws spoke otherwise. Hiccup had just managed to peek at the beast rearing up for its attack, and resigned himself for the end.

So thenâ€¦ it was useless. He was useless, after all.

"HICCUP!"

Out of nowhere, the seemingly inactive Toothless had leapt from wherever he was in the moments before now and tackled the Nadder in the same way Erika had tackled his boy. Despite his small size, he had pushed the Nadder back and got the two of them rolling away towards a more open space in the midst of the battleground. By the time they had stopped, Toothless had his wild slit eyes locked onto any vital spot he could find on the beast, tearing and mauling away its neck trying to rip it apart.

_"KEEP YOUR MESSED-UP JAWS OFF OF MY BOY!" _ Toothless growled.

The Nadder responded by grabbing the Night Fury's tail with its own and with whip-lashing speed yanked him right off of its body. Toothless was sent hurdling towards and crashing into a cart of weapons nearby.

"Toothless!" Hiccup cried.

Before the Night Fury had time to recover, more dragons collided into him. Though they did not explode, the demons still managed to wound Toothless as they used their teeth, beaks, and claws to tear into his scaly hide. The downed young dragon let out shriek after shriek as he was buried in a pile of jagged fangs and ruined claws as they brutally tore at him, tossing him around like a ragdoll. A Gronkle came close to breaking a rib with a head-butt at his side, a Monstrous Nightmare sunk its serrated claws right through his scale armor. The Nadder joined back in by butting into the group and snagging Toothless by his tail once again and slamming him into the ground. No pause, no chance for escape â€“ each second was another moment being torn apart and sliced to pieces.

"Toothless, Toothless!" Hiccup screamed, rushing to help his beloved friend. He continued to scream out Toothless' name, even as his voice broke under the strain and bits of blood got caught in his throat. A tail suddenly knocked the boy back, rolling into the ground as Toothless continued to shriek.

There was a terrible sound of ripping flesh, of claws digging into protective hide and tearing it, the sound of blood seeping into the dusty ground. By then, Toothless' growls of anger had faded away, replaced with high-pitched wailing of pain. Toothless' wailing was the worst. It physically hurt him to hear such agony from the Night Fury; Hiccup felt as though someone had taken out his heart and pulverized it.

"Stop! Stop it! Leave him alone!"

He screamed and begged, tearfully and hopelessly pleading for mercy from beasts that were no longer capable of such kindness.

Toothless was impossible to spot under the pile of vengeful devils, but Hiccup could spot stray bits of black scales scattered across the ground that was wet with blood. Hiccup felt woozy and about to vomit out his woes, as though someone had hit him in the gut with a war hammer.

"Pleaseâ€¦ stopâ€¦" Hiccup whimpered out in utter heartache as he clutched at his side, barely noticing the blood that seeped out of the wound given to him by the spiked tail. He fell to his knees, weak. All he could notice was the heart wrenching shrieks of anger and pain from his best friend; what mattered of his own wounds when his best friend was dying right in front of him and he could do nothing to stop it?

If being stared down by that malicious Nadder didn't bring the feeling of soul-crushing powerlessness to the boy, than this certainly did.

By now his companion should have been a pile of blood and scales, and yet all he could do was cry ever-failingly for it to stop. He felt powerless, pathetic, and utterly deserving of the nickname his pig-headed cousin gave him when they were children. It all felt like Berk all over again, but worse. Because at least on Berk he had Toothless, but hereâ€¦ here seemed to be the end. The end of it all. Because if Toothless died, so too did Hiccup.

Kneeling down, head bent, Hiccup's fingers clutched the dirt. Blood pooled down his fingers, dripping onto the ground, but he did not notice. He was too far-gone to care of his own self-being, not when Toothless was now possibly gone.

"Afterâ€¦ after we came so farâ€¦" he gasped out, frantic breaths drawn ragged from both pain and anguish, "Is this all I can do?"

Did they even accomplish anything?

The undead dragons seemed to have slowed down their attacks, though their ferocity did not regress. Some of them even flew off, looking for more targets to prey upon.

Hiccup caught sight of a prone form lying on its side, nothing more than a dark lump. The boy crawled closer, panting from exertion and pain but kept going, pushing past his limits to reach his friend.

"Toothlessâ€¦"

The limp figure didn't move. Hiccup hurried closer, practically dragging himself towards the Night Fury. Inches seemed like miles in his fatigue and sorrow as he crawled over_._ Despair pieced his heart at the mere thought of dying alone, without Toothless at his side.

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"Hiccupâ€¦ runâ€¦"

"Toothless?" Hiccup muttered. It was the strangest sensation, actually hearing something akin to a voice in his mind, weak and weary. He was by no means sure if the mental call was that of his friend, but there was no denying the feeling of relief that flooded throughout him.

"Get... out of hereâ€¦ forget about meâ€¦"

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No.

He was no warrior, no hero, but by no means was his best friend going to die because of that. If destiny or whatever demanded that only one of them could survive now, than no matter what it took, it would be Toothless.

Having been disarmed from when he had been captured, Hiccup felt around and without a glance, grabbed the nearest object he could find â€“ a piece of broken wood from raining debris. He slowly, shakily, got on his feet, wincing at the pain in his stomach and, well, _everywhere._ He pushed away the agony into the deepest recesses of his mind, too focused on the task at hand to care about pain.

Taking what could hardly be considered a battle-ready stance, the fallen warrior youth gathered all of his willpower and screamed with all his might and charged forward with the makeshift weapon raised above his head, cutting a path through the fog in all his courageous fury.

"GET AWAY FROM MY FRIEND!"

The swing astounded both boy and dragon as it unleashed a blinding slash of light at the monsters, scattering them all. The cut unleashed dispersed some strange power that actually cleaved those who had been caught in it apart. The two who received the full force of this attack actually disappeared into small motes of light that vanished into the air.

Blinded in his furious desire to save his only friend, Hiccup carried on with each attack. To onlookers who may have been watching, the image portrayed of him hacking away at the devilish creatures with eyes stung with tears amidst the shards would have looked beautiful, if not tragic. He swung and swung madly, consumed only by the thought of his friend dying and every possible method he could take to keep it from happening. The flurry of attacks he unleashed cut a swath through the group leading him all the way to where Toothless was, covered in terrible scars and bruises and dyed over with his own blood.

"Hiccupâ€¦ what did youâ€¦?"

"It's okay, bud. I've got your back." Hiccup muttered rubbing his dragon's head.

"But Hiccupâ€¦ what is that?"

The boy looked to where his dragon gestured with his snout, and was completely taken over by surprise. What he had assumed in the back of his mind was some plank of wood had gained the shining cobalt-blue outline of an actual weapon. Intricate and well-crafted detail seen even through its transparency, it was a blade unknown to any warrior on this realm, yet so familiar to Hiccup's eyes.

"Is thisâ€¦ the sword from my dream?" Hiccup stared at the faint glow beginning to emit from the sword. "It'sâ€¦ it's real?"

Somehow the item he had spent long subconscious hours crafting into completion had appeared right in his hand. The hilt's volume in his grip and its power in cutting through the horde of fiendish monsters â€“ it all suggested it was real. Hiccup was incapable of any other thought as he just stared at the lighted lines of the sword, oblivious to how the remaining demons backed away almost in fear of it. Strength akin to that of a thousand warriors surged through his arms to his chest, and a hope and relief unlike anything he had ever felt began to rise within him.

But as quickly as it appeared, it vanished from his hand, dissolving in a flash and a flurry of sparkles, back to the realm of imagination from whence it came.

"What?"

"Hiccup, look out!" The boy felt his tunic and rags tugged at as Toothless pulled him back, a volley of spikes appearing in his location seconds later.

The monsters were beginning to regroup, appearing as living darkness closing in at them from all sides. Toothless leapt back to his boy's side with as much strength as his ravaged body could muster, but even then it appeared as a clumsy straddle. He slit his eyes once more and growled with fangs fully bared at the monsters, yet their hollow fortitudes remained wholly unfazed.

_"You better not be thinking of a death wish back there!" _ Toothless barked. **_"Come on, we've got work to do!"_**

The voice of the Night Fury only barely registered in his mind. From where he was, just continuing to stare dumbly at his hand, wishing the sword would return and silence the growing powerlessness in him once again.

'Come backâ€¦ Please, come backâ€¦ pleaseâ€¦'

The dismissal of the blade, his only means of defense, seemed to cement in his current place, falling endlessly in a deep pit of despair and recollection. Just as it appeared a ray of light had come, a lifeline from a distant opening that he could act upon only for it to be immediately snatched away by the callous Gods. It was here in his darkest moment where he recognized himself at last as the weak child he truly was, who clung to such hope in place of strength he never truly possessed.

Erika's words â€“

"You're the one fighting on the wrong side!"

The wrong side. Was this his punishment for that?

The armor's warning â€“

"You may be forced to take an undesirable course of action."

An undesirable course of action, that was killing in itself; who was killed and who sided with who was completely and utterly irrelevant. No one faction was justified: both armies, enemies by birth and through fate, would cry out for revenge, and no matter where Hiccup went or who he aligned with, the cycle of hatred and bloodlust would only continue. Like the sword that came and went in his hand, his dragon-saving escapades may have caused some interruption of it all, but no relevant change was made.

So then he was right all along â€“ their actions were for nothing. It was all too foolish to believe that one boy and his dragon could play hero and somehow cure the world with good intentions alone.

That realization in himself filled him with empty fury, the pit inside him filling with water, drowning him and blackening his vision. His lungs tensed up and his chest began to tighten as if bound in rope, and suddenly visions that he had always kept safe, sacredly protected in his mind, began to fade away. The sky he and Toothless shared, gone from his inner sight, replaced with flames that were cold to the touch and yet invisible to his mind. All he wanted at that point, as much as he had wanted things as cherished and desirable as love or freedom or peaceâ€¦

â€¦was something to take it all out on.

"Toothless." Hiccup coldly muttered. "Let's fly."

The dragon, admittedly concerned by Hiccup's change in behavior, said nothing as he leapt to his back and flew away. Just in time before a Monstrous Nightmare smashed its jaws against them. The two swerved around and slammed the dragon in the rear, using it as a springing point for them to blast into the air, with the demons right on their tail. Shooting ever upward, their vision ironically only became darker as they climbed, chased by an ever-increasing herd of the monsters that almost seemed to merge into one horrific maw of rage and killing intent.

With no small feat, the Night Fury broke away from their upward path in a long arc, darting back and forth with plasma shots that shot holes in the demon file. Toothless' flight was long, tired and shaky, and it was uncertain to the dragon just how much longer he could hold on. But Hiccup only stared ahead, his focus on his next target in imitation of his enemies.

"Come on, come on, come on, COME ON!" Hiccup shouted.

Propelled onward, Toothless pushed back against the body of an enemy with extra strength from his aching wings. He looped upward and came back down once again, building up gas all the while to unleash an especially strong plasma shot that scattered them like hellish butterflies in a meadow. They regrouped by swirling all around them, becoming a tornado of blacked smog and silhouettes. The dragon and boy dive bombed down to the village where the battle still raged between what was left of the Maniacals and any other demons still in the area.

The two darted in between houses and sheds, cutting through with barely adequate agility; it meant, however, that Toothless had crashed into more than a few walls. By now his wingbeats were completely erratic and his breathing heavy, though it could have been said to be a miracle that he was even sill capable of flight at all. Nevertheless, even as he took the high road and leapt off of roofs to avoid further holdbacks, he found himself running across rooftops barely able to keep altitude.

The demons flanked the two of them from left and right once they had ascended again, but Toothless and Hiccup still kept up the fight by launching additional blasts to slow down pursuit. But suddenly, the army of shadowy beasts surrounded them in swarms from all four sides, launching their flames at the two of them. Hiccup managed to save them with a quick decision to tilt and spin, letting the wind generated by Toothless' rotation blow away wind and allow them to dart ahead.

The venom smog turned completely black, as the creature merged completely, forming a massive dense cloud that took the shape of a Nightmare's head, pockets of the substance alight with chilling blue flames. Its jaw opened, revealing a sinister looking blue glow from within, and it snaked after them with alarming agility for its great size. The winds it generated with its cloudy wings blew the weakened Night Fury off, and Hiccup held on for dear life as they spiraled out of control, heading straight into its maw where death by dust awaited them.

_"No wayâ€¦ going outâ€¦ like this?" _ Toothless warbled in between pants.

"Not a chance." Hiccup answered, taking the ebony dragon by surprise. "It's notâ€¦ not OVER YET!"

Hiccup yanked the head of his friend back as much as he could, turning Toothless over until he was belly up in the sky. He then wrapped his legs around the dragon's sides and held on with all his strength while his hands reached out to Toothless' leather wings and pulled them closed.

"Now, bud! SHOOT!"

The Night Fury in his panic and weariness did as instructed, already in the midst of falling, and just before the demon could devour them, the propulsion launched them down towards the island again, safe and still in flight. The beast quickly slithered through the sky and locked onto them, the two of them sweeping across the island once again with trails of deadly smoke in their wake.

Toothless just managed to pull above the beast and fired three more plasma blasts into its back, yet they harmlessly passed through its body, even fire useless against its now intangible hide. Its skin suddenly seemed to melt and droop away, perhaps to correct that assumption. The form of a dragon, made from smog, suddenly turned into a shapeless blob of slime with spiny tentacles that reached out to grab them. Toothless, having finally reached his limit in both ammo and stamina, was powerless to fight back. All he and Hiccup could do now as they looked back and forth at the grabbing tendrils was scream as they were pulled in, their struggle finally put to an end.

"Dammit. DAMMIIIITT!"

The mass grew and grew until it encompassed the entire island, innocents and warriors completely swallowed up with their screams silenced in a matter of moments. It began to leak and drip from every cliff and corner, and run overflowing from the sides into the ocean. The island began to crumble and fall apart, overwhelmed by the invasive magnitude.

Until a bright blue light beamed forth from the heavens, enveloping the landmass and the fountain of black slime. It was blinding and piercing, breaking holes through the walls of black sludge, evaporating it into nothingness.

And the world went silent.

* * *

><p>When he awoke, there was nothing.<p>

The outpour of light amidst the enveloping darkness was all he could remember, only to be greeted with a vast wasteland. Nothing remained: houses were reduced to complete rubble, weapons and personal possessions laid coldly upon the ground, and only sparse remnants of bones turned to ash with Viking helmets atop them were scattered about. The fog that cloaked the ground from view had turned black and still engulfed the cloudy morning air with a stale and enduring gloom.

As for the demonic dragons, they shared the same status as their victims â€“ not a single one could be found stalking about. Any debatable proof of their existence lay strewn across the landscape in the form of broken pieces of skeletal stone statues crafted in their likeness. This time they did not reform: they remained as lifeless as they were naturally meant to be. The entire scene gave the impression of the village having been frozen at a catastrophic point in time and abandoned for centuries, making the inscrutable truth of its destruction in a single night all the more unbelievable.

Every bone in Hiccup's entire body ached as he attempted to stand as though he had been hit straight on with Thor's hammer MjÃ¶lnir itself. His arms felt flimsy and every muscle screamed in agony when he pressed against the ground. The agony of his broken and weary body only allowed for blurred vision in scanning the area for a black dragon no doubt in worse shape.

"Toothless, Toothlessâ€¦?" Hiccup called out weakly.

The winged creature in question sauntered up before him, but the sight was by no means pleasant. The few who could have called the sight of the Night Fury, the rarest of all dragons, majestic would have been shamefully silenced seeing the beast been made a spectacle of injuries. Blood leaked in every spot imaginable from cuts varying in severity, his once beautiful proud scales were chipped and missing, and his wings now dragged across the ground. Toothless trailed towards him with a heavy limp gazing with tired, dilated eyes, one half-shut.

"I-I'm comingâ€¦ I'm coming, Hiccup."

Hiccup's eyes began to sting with tears â€“ happy or sad he could no longer tell. But it all turned to surprise when both of them heard a voice from the shoreline.

"Oy! Are you all right!?"

The voice was vaguely familiar to Hiccup, due in part to the distinctive accent compared to most up north. Regardless, any human meant trouble, so he turned to Toothless, whose ear flaps had perked up in alarm and had stepped back. As soon as the two crossed gazes, they both found their second wind, and leapt to action.

"I saw the mess from over on my ship. Are you the only one here? Oy!"

Without another glance back, the two had rocketed into the sky, the

now devastated former home of the Maniacal Tribe quickly becoming a speck on the ocean. Off they went, a boy who had lost hope for this world and all of its creatures and his dragon, the boy's sole friend and confidant. They vanished far into the dead horizon of clouds and morning sun barely seeping in, far from the archipelago and from any reminder of war and strife.

Far from view, at the very top of a mountain overlooking the now lifeless island, stood the disembodied suit of armor. Not even the warriors of Asgard from on high could tell it had been watching the forlorn pair disappear from sight with no eyes of its own to see. All it gave to this sight was a mental message conveyed over miles and miles of wind and water.

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Two paths now stand before you.

_One leads to safety and despair, wallowing in your inability to affect change. The other leads to anguish and pride, where you carry on in your search for fated truth. _

The latter is torturous upon the mind and the body. Whichever is chosen, there shall be no turning back.

If you'd choose this path still, the time will come when we meet again, and you will know.

Until then, your trial continues.

* * *

><p>Okay, I don't know how well it was pulled off, but this chapter was all about Hiccup facing up to reality. The whole 'humans are bad, dragons are good' thing is just naÃ ve thinking on his part, similar to the kind of struggles we're going through in the US right now. It's a testament to the fact that when it comes to war, no one side is right, and that in picking a fight with people, Hiccup's just trying to turn a blind eye to it all.

Anyway, you readers will be happy to know that this was the last '_DARK!'_ chapter for a while. From here on out, we head into some more familiar ground with more recognizable faces and things begin to look up for Hiccup and Toothless. But know that these zombie dragons are going to be seen again. The next chapter, however, will just feature another flash over to Berk â€“ and yes, the guy calling out (who happens to be a known character himself) will make an appearance.

In the meantime, with these chapters delivered, I'll be typing the next chapter of 'The New Life' up next: thanks to everyone for their patience. And look forward to new episodes of 'Race to the Edge' coming back on the 8th.

Thanks again to NinjaRiderWriter. His updates this time were some of his best yet.

As always, review, favorite, follow! And Happy New Year!

17. Chapter 17

**Sorry this came a little late. The delay came as a result of procrastination, writer's block, and having to take care of my mother who's recently gone through hip surgery. Thanks to all the reviewers for their comments; honestly, this new chapter's not my best work, but here it is. **

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* * *

><p>"I'm telling you, a scene straight out of a nightmare it was!" Shouted a foreigner's voice that barely broke through the clamor of Viking voices.<p>

"Ah, Johann, yer pullin' my leg. The good one, at tha'." Gobber answered with a sip of mead from a mug prosthetic attached to his wrist.

The Great Hall of Berk was filled with sparse numbers of Vikings huddled in groups at each of the grease and mead-stained tables everywhere, their massive girths restricting any elbowroom. Most seated were members of similar clans staying together, true to their underlined bonds of blood. Lit stone hearths flickered merrily against the walls, while the cooking fires brewed whatever scraps could be spared of their dwindling food stocks into the watery evening broth.

Men and women alike drank heartily as the fires warmed their solemnly stocked backs, if not their hearts chilled by greater woes of war. Many of their hairs had begun to show advanced signs of greying while others rubbed at the still aching pain underneath their bandages recent battles. The lines in the faces had grown over the years, becoming deeper and longer with the passing of countless hungry nights.

Old Trader Johann, a once welcome sight to weary ember-stung eyes, had noticed the dampened spirits around him, but did his best to pay it no mind. The story was more or less the same no matter where he went, tribes declining in stability and spirit ever since the war entered a frightful new stage. For the longest time, he had let his business take blows in favor of a twinge of loyalty to his fellow humans and had done his best to aid in the cause.

The only valuable that the trader could claim to have today was a story that belonged more in the annals of myth and fantasy. A commodity the Vikings of Berk were reluctant to take.

"On my word as a merchant, I kid you not, Master Gobber. A grim fate has befallen the Maniacal Tribe, her lands burned and her people decimated." He waved his arms in almost religious gesture. "Nary a trace of life as far as either of me eyes could see. The moment I docked upon that graveyard of an island, the devastation was burned into my eyes as it must have been to those poor souls in their final momentsâ€¦"

Gobber rolled his eyes at Johann's words, his fingers picking at a stray morsel of meat stuck between his teeth. "The Maniacals are a pain in the keister, but they wouldn't go n' set themselves up fer

godhood if they didn't have some idea o' whut they were doin."

"They spoke more often than not of being the saviors of this worldâ€¦," Johann gained a rise of warmth from his dry humor and the warm mead filling him. "Quite the tall tale indeed."

"Ah'd put the break on those rollin' eyes if I were you."

"A-ah-ha, eh-yes, wellâ€¦" he stuttered. "Well, pity their zealously assumed divinity gave no aid to them against that onslaught of dragons what attacked their island."

"Eh, well. At least yer not stretchin' it there."

"Indeed! Why, even from upon my ship as I saw fire the most bluest of blues burn while the sky had turned the most malignant shade of black. Infested by the wings of an army of dragons â€“ dozens, hundreds, thousands! All dead and rotten with mangled wings and broken bones!"

"Now yer stretchin' it." Gobber wet his throat and eased his head with another sip of mead.

"Not even in the volcanic nether regions of Vanuatu had I seen such destruction, natural or otherwise. What I saw would have been enough to send shivers down the spine of any man, how the flighty warriors of Loki swarmed down, engulfing the island in a massive pillar of shadow. When all of a sudden, a beam of pure light cut through that massive vortex, and-"

"An' then wee sprites came down riding yaks with wings dressed in skirts made from dead folks' back hairs singing "Led Mead Flow on Midgard!" Gobber shouted. "Johann, if I had a chicken egg fer every tall tale o' yersâ€¦"

"I wouldn't say I talk that muchâ€¦" Johann muttered.

"I'dâ€¦ well, I'd be a celebrity in Papua, that's fer sure."

"Not the most advisable place to visit. I speak from experience there."

"And excuse me fer havin trouble takin yer word on that!" Gobber slammed his mug-hook down on the table. The man's skepticism was like a wall of pure, impenetrable iron. "Ah mean, ya make it sound like Ragnarok's on its way!"

Johann looked at the man with humorless eyes. "Now, Master Gobber, I am well aware of my eccentricity, my flair for the dramatic. How everywhere so often I tweak and stretch my stories a wee bit-"

"A wee bit?" Gobber choked out with a hearty laugh.

"But I wouldn't be tellin you this if it was some trick of the senses, even I know how the slightest of things can affect them." Johann tried to pacify.

"Nice of ya to explain the trobbin' in mah head." Gobber muttered setting his tankard down.

At that point, even the timid Johann had had all he could take of the old smith's passing him off. He rose up and gave his best slam of the table. Everything from his whispered tone to his grim face and near-dulled eyes conveyed the true horror of it all. "Deny it all you like, good sir, but I saw what I saw. The Maniacal Tribe _is _gone, reduced to ruin in the span of a single night. I have the dead gravel on my boots to prove it, no doubt the withered remains of bone and flesh!"

"He speaks the truth!"

All heads present turned to the booming, authoritative voice coming from the Hall's entrance. There stood a large man with a beard of dark-grey hair regally worn as any chief would wear it. He was dressed in a wool shirt with a leather jacket and wristbands studded with metal spikes and a large belt wrapped around his torso, adorned with the shape of a vicious-looking dragon. To his sides stood Spitelout and a young child in tattered clothes with fiery red hair, and behind him were a legion of Vikings clad, or rather bound, in heavy chains whose faces were hidden by mask-like metal helmets.

The mighty-looking man walked through the hall with an air of both gentleness and power, bringing all he passed to their feet instantaneously. Slowly he walked forward to the table where Johann and Gobber were once seated, meeting them both with a grim face that both felt was ill-placed upon him.

"Chief Oswald?" Gobber asked.

"Good to see you, Gobber."

Oswald the Agreeable, a strange title given to an equally strange man as far as battle-hardened Norsemen were concerned. Especially in consideration that he was chief of the Berserkers, one of the more deadly and unpredictable tribes composed of insane men deemed unfit by many to wield weapons in fear of who they would turn them on. At the same time, he was an altruist, the fount of a more positive energy that filled the Archipelago, a man who could easily speak the words everyone wanted to hear in ways they understood.

When the internal conflict amongst the islands broke out three years ago, Oswald's tribe abstained from joining in the chaotic violence. His own calloused hands were to him a reminder that the ties they had between them were what they should cling to most strongly, and one such hand was offered to fallowed islands all across the Nordic Sea impartially offering the wealth of his resources to rebuild. Any other Viking chief who knew of the man could only offer words of respect for the strides he made to restore stability to their weakened tribes with impartial assistance. If not from his own unhinged warriors who wanted nothing more than to join in the bloodbath.

If men were born with wings upon their backs, surely the noble chief deemed by many a blessing to the Viking Isles would have wings of the grandest size with nary a drop of blood upon them. Gobber, the ever-equipped chief could not help but bow his head as he approached and offered a handshake, as if he could truly see such wings. Oswald returned the shake in respect to his old acquaintance.

"What's the Chief of the Berserkers doin' here, with his whole tribe,

no less?" He asked. "Ah didn't hear about this!"

"Apologies, Gobber. I know it ain't formal, but I am still a Viking," Oswald said with a dry chuckle. "That, and a mattar such as this is best discussed face-to-faceâ€¦"

"Ah'm well aware courtesy's a dead practice around here, but yew'd think a heads-up'd be a little called for. S'not often we get visits from other chiefs these days. I'd imagine yer greetin' was a bit lackin'â€¦"

"Well, you don't need'tae worry about that," spoke a new voice from behind the crowd. "I made sure they got a proper welcome."

All turned to find an especially smug-looking Spitelout marching in past the large creaking doors of the Great Hall. Gobber's face instantly morphed into a scowl with the sight of the Jorgenson patriarch marching towards them as it did in recent days. Spitelout came right up to Oswald's side and gave the man a hearty pat on the shoulder.

"An' you were planning to announce the Berserker Tribe sailin' in when?" Gobber asked sarcastically.

"Ah don't believe diplomatic affairs between chiefs is any business of a blacksmithâ€¦"

"Beg pardon? Who died an' made you chief?" Asked an eyebrow-raised Gobber. "Stoick's still breathin', last ah checked."

"I'm sure he is, wherever he is between here an' Helheim's Gate off on yet another hunt for the dragon nest." Spitelout intoned.

Stoick the Vast had long ago made it his mission to find the dragon nest and eliminate the scourge of the winged beasts ever since the death of his wife, but Hiccup's death just seemed to relight the fire within him. Many of the common folk on Berk could hardly say they saw him anymore as the man was missing almost all hours of the day searching out on the open water. In the somewhat rare instances he came back, it was only to restock on supplies or lock himself in the hall with the men he had forced along with him run ragged. A great deal of people were concerned as they couldn't help but notice their chief was slowly turning into something else.

"Alright, you two," pacified Oswald as he stepped with arms out between the two. "I have better things to do than watch you two go on like children. As I said, Gobber, this is an urgent mattar."

"Wait, you mean you believe this loon!?"

"Now let's not descend into insults hereâ€¦" Johann interjected.

"I hav'tae believe, on account of ah've seen it mahself." Oswald spoke, concerned. "As if Gungnir had struck the isle of the Maniacals, my son, men, and I saw it with our own eyes from our shores. Johann, I take it you've seen the island yerself."

"That I have, Master Oswald. As I related to the Berk smithy, a home for phantoms is all it is now."

The more he heard the tale confirmed as it went back and forth between the two men, the more old Gobber felt the beads of sweat rolling down his face. Each drop down splatting with concussive sound onto the stone floor was another pull towards confirmation of the truth. His throat went dry with facing the possibility of truly accepting the existence and machinations of Gods in their world.

But the smith was in no mood to believe in fairy tales and miracles, not since the life of his young apprentice was claimed. The day little Hiccup was burned alive in that shed was the day Gobber had lost faith in the Gods who supposedly kept them shielded in their good graces. Whether anyone wanted to admit it or not, the loss of the boy had triggered some karma effect, leaving Berk's well-being akin to a stone rolling further and further down a hill riddled with stones of ill-fortune.

"Soâ€¦ there really wasn't anyone there?" Asked a young voice that piped up from the rumble of men's tones. "Not even one teeny, tiny little corpse?"

All three men looked down to see the owner of the voice, none other than the Berserker Chief's young son, Dagur. The red-haired heir to the Berserker Tribe had grown rapidly by the accounts of the Berkian men. Though in his tattered garb he looked to have crawled out from the woodworks of a ruined village himself.

Though still in his youth, Dagur had already begun to display the disturbing aptitude for cruel deviousness and crazed combat the Berserkers were known and named for. On visits to their island, both Gobber and Johann could remember his horrid behavior that was every bit akin to his insane ancestors. Children forced to play with him out of a lapse in judgment by their parents actually came out with bleeding wounds and broken limbs. Even now, the two could see nothing but a sick desire to be regaled with accounts of blood and gore like a fabulous present in the boy's eyes, sharp as flint, hotter than dragon fire, gleaming with both ancient glints of past and flashes of future madness.

"Ah, I'm terribly sorry, young Master Dagur." Johann said, trying his best to please the unpredictable child.

Dagur spat in disappointment. Life and goodness were practically bile on his own tongue. "Ah, seriously? What's the point in destroying a village if you don't get to leave behind any corpses? That's, like, Pillaging 101!"

"Dagur!" Oswald scolded.

Dagur's young, round face scrunched up in a scowl. "Well, it is!"

"A whole tribe was wiped out in one night." Oswald said darkly, his tone as sharp as a whip. "People, women, children, animals, everything! Show a little sympathy!"

"â€¦ Syymmm-pathy?" Dagur struggled with the almost foreign word to him. "What's that?"

Oswald gave a tired groan before Gobber spoke up. "Alright, Dagur. Why don't you go andâ€¦ playâ€¦ with the other kids?"

"Nobody asked for your opinion, you stupid cripple!" Dagur shouted and stuck his tongue out.

"Dagur!" Oswald shouted and turned to silence the men behind him who were actually chuckling from the rude boy's quip. Public opinion of those who lost their limbs had always been divided. Dagur was among the many who were of the opinion they were just defective.

"I don't hav'tae be the only cripple here, you knowâ€¦" Gobber threatened.

The dangerous child only scoffed. "Fine, I'll 'play' with the other kidsâ€¦ but I'm gonna need a bludgeon. Or a bear trap! Or maybe, if you're shorthanded, just a really big rock!"

"Ugh," the Berserker chief groaned. "One of you justâ€¦ get him out of here."

Another Dagur-sized headache, the men assumed. One did as ordered and grabbed the unstable child by the wrist, pulling him out of the room even as he continued listing options for playthings. As soon as he was out of sight and earshot, all four men let out a medley of heavy sighs.

"That child is gonna be the death of meâ€¦"

"Prob'ly literally." Gobber added.

"Hmph, Dagur the Deranged, I hear the boys like'tae call him. He'll be fittin' tha' title well the day he comes of age." Spitelout chuckled.

"Eh, well, now that our esteemed heir ofâ€¦ mental ambiguity has departed, I'd like to let you know of something else. I feel it best to discuss this away from listening ears." Johann added.

"Don't tell me yeh saw somethin' else? What, did Odin come down on a right-grand chariot?"

"Not a god, but something far less pleasantâ€¦"

"Well, let's hear it then!" Spitelout commanded with an ever-thinning sense of patience.

Johann cleared his throat in worry, trying to shoot down all the nerves that were rising rapidly to his chest and down again. The erratic palpitations of his heart were at that point no different than the movements of dragons from midair. His knees became jittery, his hands became cold, and his stomach began to churn, all before he could so much as utter a single sound. With one final gulp, he spat it out.

"Indeed, I may have exaggerated what I found on that now graveyard of an islandâ€¦" whispered the trader. "Upon reaching the shore, my eyes caught sight ofâ€¦ someone."

"Ah'm afraid our minds don't really get the full mental picture just from 'someone.'"

"Well, I can't rightly be sure, but from all appearances, it looked

to beâ€¦ a boy." Johann began. "His body was riddled with burns and bruises and such, down upon the ground. No doubt a survivor ofâ€¦ whatever had occurred."

"A survivor?" muttered Oswald in shock. "Did ya help him?"

"Oh, I tried. I called out to the lad and offered any help I could. I wondered if he might have known if there was anyone else. But before I got to him, wellâ€¦"

"Well, what?" Gobber asked.

"Well, thatâ€¦ that's the thing. I'm not rightly sure you'll enjoy hearing thisâ€¦ particular part of the story." Johann crossed his fingers, looking rather worried as he looked at his audience. His skin had become paler, and there was a noticeable sheen of sweat on his brow.

"Johann, ah've heard you tell tales of stickin' harpoons in squid eyes an' getting' chased off by wild men in less than their skivvies." Gobber joked. "I'm pretty sure compared ta tha' nightmare fest, whatever yev got to say, it can't be any worse than-"

"A dragon! The boy flew off on a godsforsaken dragon!" He darted his eyes left and right shouting as quietly as possible.

The volume might have been earth-shattering to the three Vikings there, who stood in utter aghast shock. Even Hooligan men seated at the adjacent surrounding tables seemed to almost freeze in time, some with drops of mead just barely hanging off the edge of their mugs. Johann's eyes darted around with lightning-speed waiting with shallow breaths for the first outbreak of enraged cries to break out.

For a second, all remained still and silent in the Great Hall, nothing heard but the chilling breeze flowing from outside and the workings of village life beyond. The three Viking men before Johann all stood with their feat welded to the ground and their jaws snapped and hung low, unresponsive in their disbelief. At once, though, came a furious onslaught of every level of revulsion and bigoted shock their bitter, dragon-hating hearts could muster. Their bushy eyebrows snapped down like steel traps and they growled in an animalistic manner with crooked fang-like teeth.

"What is that s'ppose'tae mean?" intoned Oswald in nothing akin to his dignified voice from before. He just barely seemed to be keeping his cool as Gobber and Spitelout both looked as though they might combust with sheer indignation. "You really saw him fly off on a dragon?"

"Somewhere out there, some brat is gallavantin' off on a dragon, betrayin' all the whole o' Vikin' an' humankind?" Gobber asked with outstretched arms. "Oh, I ask ye, Thor, is nothin' sacred anymore!?"

Johann could not blame the two older men for their outrage. In fact, just from simply glancing around the Hall, the trader could see that the sentiment was shared as other men begin their own dark mutterings and offer nothing but vicious and crass comments. Veins rose up throughout the ruddy red of their skin from their necks and foreheads and across their tense white knuckles as they gripped their weapons

and slammed their fists on the table and spat off in random directions. It was a fest of disgust everywhere the old merchant turned to look that quickly grew more heated as more and more Vikings slowly began to rant and shout about the abomination that existed in far off lands, taunting them with its wrongness.

Only Spitelout himself could find it in himself to force a chuckle at the idea, however dry it was, as the thought was utter poison to the mind. Not even the heir of Berk he had gone to such lengths to eliminate could have matched this 'rider' in terms of pitifulness. A flash of crooked teeth in an equally crooked smile appeared on his rugged face, every part of his expression lined with arrogance unnaturally strong even for Vikings. "A Dragon Rider, such nonsenseâ€¦ yer best tale yet, Johann."

"Ah can hear ol' Mildew screamin' from his house behind the hill," muttered Gobber. "'Only thing worse than a dragon's the idiot who goes an' flies saddleback on one!"

"With all due respect, good sir, haven't you done enough laughing at my expense for one day?"

"Ah though so until you wen' an' belted this crap out!"

"A Dragon Rider?" Spitelout sarcastically drawled with a scowl. "Ah'd sooner believe the tale of the dead dragons than that load 'a yak dung! Even out'a yer mouth, that's a bit too tall a tale!"

"Let's not go shippin' him off on account o' madness yet, boys," Oswald spoke again having fully regained his composure. "I hav'tae admit, it's been some time since I've heard of a Dragon Riderâ€¦"

"An' wha's tha' s'posed ta mean, Oswald?" Spitelout growled incredulously.

"Surely yew remember the stories-"

Any further word on the matter Oswald had to give was cut off by a gust of biting blizzard-like wind that charged through the hall. Like a titanic dragon's roar it silenced every bit of sound and movement that still remained. A heraldry of the arrival of a person who nowadays seemed more machine, more weapon than man. With a cape of cold at his back, Stoick the Vast walked in, a hardened face set like stone and every bit of hair from his beard to his eyebrows was frosted to a needle-like density. He carried every kind of injury upon him from blood to burn, with the stench of metal and ash over him along with the large bag hefted upon his surprisingly-straight back.

The moment he passed by any Viking and shot an empty glare through his hollowed eyes with all the vitalized heat of simmering coals, they felt the wind knocked out of them and their feet frozen in place. With each step he took, all life and joy faded from the room. And from behind seemed came the agonized moans of the dead from the mouths of countless weary Viking men with skin crackled and blistered from dragon fire and natural cold. Stoick seemed to be almost untouched compared to them, tending to aching or broken or even missing limbs dripping with blood and sweat. Some looked ready to fall to pieces with a single touch from the sight of them.

"Dear Godsâ€¦" Oswald muttered.

"I know," muttered Spitelout. "Quite the scene, isn't it?" Yet pity gave way to an evil-looking smirk as soon as the Berserker chief's back was turned.

"I must say, he looks especially brooding todayâ€¦" Johann muttered.

Brooding was an understatement, Gobber figured, looking at the animate statue that was once his oldest friend. Ever since his murderous bout in the Kill Ring with the other dragons, Stoick had become more obsessed than ever with finding the nest. Men had to be especially foolhardy to join him in his recurrent quests in which he was gone all hours of the day, almost promised death as the reward for their labors. Wives gossiped and children gave second glances to the weapons they were prepared to uphold their legacy with when they saw the face of their once trusted leader. Even to the most mentally challenged, the divide in Berk was apparent, with many questioning their chief's understanding of the value of life and their safety as of where he stood now.

"We're here fer only a minute," Stoick growled raspily to his men. "Get back on the ship as soon as yer done restocking."

The men behind him groaned in their fatigue, yet still attempted to feign enthusiasm by raising their fists. Gobber and company could still hear the mutterings, of aching limbs, of childish whines, and even silent quips towards old Stoick himself. The darkened chief paid it no mind, only tightened his knuckles to a pure ashen white.

He gave no acknowledgement to the men huddled together as he made his way toward the back of the Hall. Once the door slammed shut behind him, all present regained feeling and sense all at once and let out sighs both tired and depressed.

"Still hangin' in there, ol' Stoick isâ€¦" Gobber sighed sadly.

* * *

><p>Wringing his hands together so tightly that the skin could have peeled off, and with a heartbeat that beat rapidly in his chest with enough force to possibly break his ribcage, Fishlegs stared at the massive doors of the Great Hall, trying to swallow back the rising fear that had rotted him in place. Surely he could have melted into a puddle from all the nervous energy heating him up from the inside like a volcano of dread ready to erupt. He kept his massively widened eyes glued on the foreboding damaged entrance to the Hall daring him to step forward after the figure of his chief, his own body questioning his next step forward.<p>

It had taken a lot for him to leave his house and walk through the village, and even more to wear a casual face like nothing was wrong. He had greeted several familiar faces on his way there with a tight-lipped grin, and each one had greeted him back with a somewhat too joyful smile in return as they went about their business. He wondered if any of them suspected any foul play in regards to the unfortunate â€“intentional! â€“ accident that resulted in the untimely death â€“murder! â€“ of Hiccup Haddock the Third.

Every tiptoe he took and every syllable uttered from his mouth was a step closer to the pivotal moment where he risked everything by confronting Stoick. It was enough to make his bowels writhe and contort to where he could have vomited out his own innards. A step forward almost immediately turned into a step back, asking him what the worth of his revelation and the unclear sacrifice that would come of it would be. His heart and mind battled for control within him: to do the right thing and tell the truth, risking the lives of his family and friends, or to keep quiet and pretend that everything was alright when it truly wasn't. His family's questionable sense of morality, his, his parents, and his people's misdirection of right and wrong in the name of self-preservation, had something to do with it, he must have figured.

But surely his former friend, who died for the sake of prestige, was worth more. Surely he didn't truly deserve the title of 'Useless.'

That was what the timid Ingerman boy told himself as he mustered the nerve to take a step forward. Soon enough, he found his feet planted on the cracked stone steps leading inward. Each step further carried the weight of a mountain, but with heavy steps he pressed on. And just as he had finally made it insideâ€¦

"Fishlegs!"

The boy gave a startled shriek and turned around quicker than a Nadder's spine shot. There was the young Astrid Hofferson, her pristine form coated in dirt stains, torn fabric, and twigs in her golden locks with an axe hoisted behind her. Obviously the result of another day spent in the forest attacking trees. Her eyes narrowed at the sight of the trembling boy, who looked positively terrified as though he had been caught doing something wicked.

"What are you doing, Fishlegs?" She asked dangerously.

"I-I-I-I was justâ€¦ uhâ€¦ y-y-you see, I-I-"

Astrid didn't need Gothi's wise council to see past Fishlegs' terrified stuttering. "You know Stoick's busy looking for the nest."

"Y-Yeah, but-"

"He's not gonna wanna hear it."

"I-I know, but maybe-"

"Do you know what's gonna happen if you tell? To us, to our parents?" She took a step forward, focused on the burning pit of betrayal in her gut as Fishlegs continued to squirm before her.

"Ahâ€¦ ah, I-"

"Come on! I'm giving you every reason not to make the biggest mistake of your life! Is any of this raising a red flag?" She pointed her axe straight at him.

Almost ironically, the appearance of her family's ancestral choice of

weapon brought to him a strange calm. He gave himself a moment to recollect himself as best he could and spoke sadly. "Astrid, Stoick is our chief, Hiccup was our friend and heir, and what we did wronged them both." He swallowed a massive lump. "The way I see itâ€¦ we've already made that mistake."

"How many times do I have to tell you? Our parents knew what they were doing! Things are better now!"

"Better?" Fishlegs asked her softly, "Have you seen Stoick? He'sâ€¦" He couldn't find the words to describe the horrible transformation their beloved chieftain had begun after the death of his child. "He's gone all the time leaving Berk starving and defenseless! H-How is that better?"

"Lets folks know they're not gonna be babied anymore for starters," Astrid scoffed, lashing back her growing bangs. "People were getting too soft around here. In case your books don't mention it, that's pretty dangerous when there's a war going on â€“ first ones to lose their edge are the first to die. Besides, Spitelout's got things covered."

"You really seem to trust him. I thought Hoffersons had a thing against Jorgensons."

"Most of the time. But once in a blue moon, they can actually do something smart."

Fishlegs watched her with growing concern, the way anger seemed to pour out of her. He'd seen what the knowledge of their parents' sinister crime had done to them, and how the creeks of guilt poured down and affected their lives in turn. Fishlegs came out of concern for his parents, who he was growing more and more convinced were slowly going mad. Having to watch their backs at every second in fear of fated retribution by unseen judges was not a life he'd wanted them to live, let alone he could agree with Astrid in saying it was good.

What little insight he had gained of others' lives as a result of this deceptive tragedy didn't allow him to penetrate that aspect of hers that she could look at and say that things had improved. He remained silent, his gaze like a hammer that could form no crack in her mental or emotional armor. In the end, all he could give was a look of sheer disappointment at the young enigma.

"â€¦ When did you start to hate him so much?"

"Excuse me?" She looked almost insulted.

"You guys were like goat milk and pie. Sure, things got messy when he started building things but at least you two were on speaking terms. W-When did all of that change?"

"I don't have to answer that," was her answer, but Fishlegs caught how her grip on her axe doubled in strength. "Besides, I really don't think you should be the one asking."

Fishlegs recoiled like he had been slapped in the face. "W-Wellâ€¦ yeah, I know. I didn't make a good decision then."

"And you're not making good decisions now, asking me or telling Stoick about him. Do the smart thing like you usually do and leave all this alone."

"But my mom and dad-"

"-are gonna have to learn to keep their cool. You need to tell them that instead of skipping along risking banishment or worse for all of us on your loose lips. If one of us goes down, we _all _do." She prodded the boy in the chest with barely any force as she knew, yet was enough to make him surprisingly stumble back.

Fishlegs gave only a small sigh and a timid nod after half a minute and moved away from the steps. He bowed his head low as he passed the girl and walked away from the Hall. He had to admit, the further away he got, the more his heart seemed to return to his control. As cold as she was, Astrid had a point in the foolhardiness of revealing everything at this point. But as he walked away, Astrid spoke:

"He got on my nerves, he was annoying and got in everyone's wayâ€¦" Astrid declared, even as her voice threatened to shake. Slowly, she hung her head low, her blonde bangs shielding her eyes from Fishlegs' view. There was a small downturn of her lips, the closest thing Astrid had that could have conveyed regret. "But I didn't hate him..."

There was a moment of tense silence, neither party willing to speak.

"For what it's worth, I did wish there was another way." Her words were rushed, as though they might lose that fleeting sense of truth if not spoken quickly enough. Her fingers gripped the handle of her axe, her knuckles white. "But sometimes, to move forward, you've gotta make some cutbacks. Do the wrong things for the right reasons." She turned and walked past him into the village square. "â€¦That's what my dad says, anyway."

Without another word, Astrid turned on her heels and headed into the village square, leaving behind an open-jawed Fishlegs to gape at her. '_It was wrong... it wasn't done for any reasonâ€¦ it was murder,' _He thought to himself as he began to follow her with tiny steps, their secrets remaining safe for another day.

Village life went on as it did, the fruit sellers and fishmongers shouting good prices, wood being hefted to where it was needed, fishing vessels and lumberjacks sent out to gather more and more supplies. A delicate peace, no more than a lie that would be exposed as soon as the next round of warfare commenced, the next batch of supplies would be stolen and the next to die would be burned to ash. And yet, neither child dared to speak against it, both content to deceive themselves a little longer.

But neither the children, nor anyone else for that matter, noticed the disturbed child sitting by the wall with an axe in hand and a whetstone in the other. A malicious and savage grin struck his face accompanied by scraping sounds almost unbearable to the ear as he ran the stone against his axe blade.

He had heard every word shared between the two, and could only offer a dark giggle at the hidden subtext. The giggle turned into a

deranged chuckle, and the boy threw his head back, his form shaking with every single cackle. Wiping away tears of laughter, the boy stared gleefully at the unknowing Fishlegs and Astrid with terrifying sharp eyes.

"Oh-ho, boy. Things are really getting interesting around here. Can't wait to see how this all turns out."

* * *

><p>So, yeah, the guys you called out Johann called it, and now Dagur and the Berserkers are a part of this mess too. What's more is the standpoint of Fishlegs and Astrid on Hiccup's death, which will carry on into the story. Next chapter gets into a little more familiar ground as we begin a pivotal point for Hiccup.

As always, review, favorite, follow! Thanks again to NinjaRiderWriter for edits.

18. Chapter 18

Human and dragon sailed through the air at no particular speed and with no particular destination in mind. Before them was nothing of importance: rolling waves of black below them and churning clusters of gray above them, showering down first snow onto their heavy shoulders. Almost like the phantoms they were once rumored to be they transparently passed by with every speck of snow and ice gathering on their forms, dotting them with forming patches of white. Breathing heavy steamy breaths like their lungs were not there, blood flowing like their hearts didn't exist, and heavy wingbeats pumping warm surges into their bodies to fortify against the growing cold like their aching bones weren't real.

They had flown far in the few years that had passed, their solemn journey having taken them far from the Barbaric Archipelago. Devoid of the purpose they had made for themselves through a cold slap of reality, the two had been reduced to wayward wanderers. The boy was now fourteen years of age by human time yet carrying the sorrows and regrets of a man ten times that.

Toothless dared to look back at his companion, something that seemed to be almost a challenge in recent days. The reason why? It always hurt to see that face that even cold stone statues had more life in them than. Eyes that were unseeing, calloused hands that had no strength in them other than what it took not to fall off and plummet into the frigid sea.

He crooned once with the saddest of eyes. _**"â€¦Hiccupâ€¦?"**_

As always, Hiccup didn't respond. Not a hint of notice.

Though they didn't talk of it, evidence of that night when the Maniacal Tribe's annihilation still remained present. Multitudes of scars from both teeth and claws littered Toothless' lithe body, his once blackened skin now an off-color shine from where he had been mauled. It was a blow to his dragon's pride to always appear as though he were a bone to gnaw upon rather than one of the deadliest of all dragons, and the sting the cuts still gave when touched was no

help either.

Hiccup was more or less frozen in time from all appearances, dressed in the same ratty, worn clothes from his youth: a tunic and vest with boots, along with a tattered cape frayed at the end. After fleeing up north, Hiccup's clothing had begun to prove inadequate due to the far more hazardous cold of the northern lands, and even now ice had begun to slowly spread across the fabric. The weapons and equipment he had once worn in readiness for the threat he was brazen enough to challenge were gone, save for little more than tools for basic survival.

Turning his gaze in a rare instance to something other than the moving muscles beneath Toothless' scales, Hiccup spied movement in the water. Sea dragons, a trio of Seashockers, appeared from beneath the waves. Their hides were normally vibrant variations of blue and green, but red could be spied slightly in this instance â€“ bleeding wounds, no doubt from encounters with Scauldrons or perhaps more greedy dragon trappers looking for more profitable breeds to capture.

Toothless seemed almost eager to swoop down and help, if only to drag some action out of his beloved human. He turned again to Hiccup seated on his back, waiting for the boy to make the ultimate call. The longer he stared at the suffering beasts below was enough to make Toothless claw at his own hide with impatience.

"_**Hiccupâ€¦ come on, do somethingâ€¦" **_ He crooned worriedly.

But Hiccup only continued to stare, unflinching and without any sign of remorse or any discernible emotion whatsoever. He gazed down like he had in days long past when the world was best and could only be seen through a small crack in the woodwork. Finally, he turned away, giving Toothless a soft nudge at the side to spur him on.

The Night Fury felt Hiccup lay down upon his spine to stare upward at the sky. It had become a habit of his every time he'd laid eyes on someone, human or dragon, in distress. The depressed thoughts flowing through his mind seemed to seep out from his body and into Toothless's without pause or warning, or mercy.

Hiccup was a good child who set his sights too high, and came to be faced with a harsh truth and nearly lost his life twice as a result. Generosity and strength spared to protect the weak was a price he now longer wished to afford, especially when it served little purpose in the end. When he looked at little tragedies such as those bruised Seashockers, all he could think of such efforts quickly being rendered meaningless through some cruel twist of fate as they had before â€“ a stone thrown into a raging ocean, making no such change to affect them in every way. What could his meager power change now, and really, what did it change before?

Nothing.

"Gods, I'm an idiotâ€¦" He spoke quietly. His voice had become deep from both puberty and emotional weight.

Toothless could sense better than perhaps anyone could that Hiccup had been struggling, forcing himself just to get through the days.

Sensing his emotions was really the only kind of dialogue the Night Fury could have with his boy anymore. And all he could feel were things he didn't think belonged in Hiccup's heart â€“ fear, sadness, confusion, emptiness, and despair.

Perhaps through some god's pity, a small island finally came into the unfocused view of the two. The sight allowed Toothless to admit some of the exhaustion he had been feeling as he turned to Hiccup. He was still looking upward and gave a tired sigh, the rough translation being 'do whatever you want.'

It was a small happiness for Toothless to be given a chance to land after flying for days straight, so he swooped down to the island with no delay. Landing on the stony beach, Toothless happily stretched his sore and tender limbs, every slight movement creaking his bones. The relief it gave was small but instantaneous and like a scratch to the chin it caused him to drop limply on the ground and give him ample time to relax. Drifting to sleep would have been what naturally came next, yet for a dragon as worried as Toothless was for a despondent loved one, it didn't come.

His boy in question simply rose from his back and wandered to the edge of the beach, where the icy shore rolled in and out like any other island. Everything â€“ the days, the scene, the natural goings on â€“ just blended with one another, nothing any different than anything else. He lived in a stagnant world; that was as clear to him now as the reflection that showed upon the water's surface.

Toothless walked, almost limped, and sat beside him on the shore. Falling to the ground in a tired head, Toothless nuzzled Hiccup to sit beside him, and when the boy finally sat Toothless curled his body around the child protectively. He chanced a peek up at his human companion, who continued to stare out into the horizon.

No longer did Hiccup wear those bandages to cover his burned eye, but rather kept it on display to the world as a symbol of humility. That eye had witnessed death without reason and the futility in trying to stop it, the skin around it had been ruined by those who relished in the bloodshed around them.

The scar defined Hiccup. It was the boy's entire life story that could be read with a simple glance. Toothless, while thankful that the boy no longer seemed self-conscious of his ruined face, couldn't help but worry about the sudden change in tune. After hiding it for so long, to suddenly reveal it to the world made Toothless question Hiccup's stability.

That scar would always be there to remind them both that hatred and war were inevitable, and that it was what the world wanted more than anything else.

There was no greater relief for ignorant humans or beasts than to be able to blame all their woes on an enemy they could destroy. When Toothless himself thought about it, it was downright ignorant to say they were fixing the problem anymore than they were simply just choosing a side. Vikings themselves easily took up arms against dragons in attempts to fight against their fate and optimistically claim they were making a difference. What was worse was that in carrying the opinion they were saving an entire race with it, they

were behaving no different than the messiah-complex tribe of the Maniacals who simply had the gall to boast it in comparison. They had become the very things they hated â€“ the thought repulsed Toothless all the more with its accuracy.

Hiccup must have felt the same because he angrily slapped the water away almost clawing at the water to fully erase what he saw. His teeth were gritted and he glared down at his distorted reflection with cold disgust intensified as soon as a clear image of his face came back.

"Maybe I should have died in that shed. That was the plan, after allâ€¦"

"_**Hiccup, don't say thatâ€¦" **_Toothless moaned.

"Why did I think I could make a difference?"

Toothless let his ear flaps down, not able to give an answer.

"I thoughtâ€¦ I thought when that sword came into my hand, Iâ€¦ all of a sudden, it felt like I couldâ€¦ do something. Like I actually had that kind of powerâ€¦"

The Night Fury's ears perked at the mention of the sword, which had become a taboo subject between them for some time. Silence became a dull comfort for the both of them mostly to ignore the horrors of the past. He didn't remember much himself, but Hiccup had supposedly managed to save him with some enchanted human weapon that vanished from his grip seconds after it appeared. He'd been given a seconds-long boon for whatever reason only for it to be taken away, seemed rather pointless when everything was said and done and the Maniacals were wiped out.

"_**Well, you were able to save me with it. That counts for something." **_Toothless crooned with a nudge at Hiccup's shoulder.

"To be completely honest, bud, when it was in my hand, I guess there was this small part of me that thought I wasn't supposed to have something like thatâ€¦ Guess it caught that."

"_**Probably those jerks' voices in your headsâ€¦ Hiccup, you are so much more than you think you are."**_

"What does any of it matter now?" He sighed. "I'm done."

Hiccup huddled into himself and laid his head down, unable to even look at the world that he had failed so greatly in. Toothless took Hiccup under his neck and kept him close by his side. For that moment nature somberly played out in silence, giving both the time they wished to simply lament.

Toothless's ears suddenly perked at a distant sound, a roar carried on the winds from far behind them. Shielding his boy with his wings in an automatic response, he turned and focused his eyes upon the source. A pack of wild dragons, beating their large wings almost frantically and heading towards them. The Night Fury left his unmoving boy and crouched down low to prepare for the oncoming threat.

The trio of dragons at the head crashed down with a fierce boom upon the dead soil, and truly neither Hiccup nor Toothless had ever seen the like of them before. One had an elongated neck with large frills, one a snout with bumps littered all over like acne, one looked like a cross between a Gronkle and a Nadder with a large horn upon its snout. The eyes of all three were wide with panic, slits tinged near red with the warning to step aside if either knew what was good for them. A message Toothless issued back with an enraged hiss and claws at the ready to rend through as many hides as need be.

The dragons circled one another, carrying through nearly inaudible rumbles from their throats that no further movement was allowed at the moment. Toothless planted his talons as firmly as possible in the soil to make himself an impassible wall of which Hiccup was on the other side. Tension made the air almost volcanically hot as the wait dragged on.

The wild dragons charged with impatient fervor; the Night Fury almost had little time to react. One had collided into him and another did the same, sending them both tumbling before leaping off and flying up. Toothless shook his head dazed by the sudden outburst. Luckily his senses were just stable enough for the third â€“ the husky blue dragon in the center. Like the second it collided head first with Toothless, but with a greater preparedness, Toothless had managed to push the dragon off with a heavy swipe to its side that left a severe wound before hitting it dead on with a plasma blast. It exploded with a blue shockwave right into its horned snout and knocked it out.

But the merciless Toothless didn't stop there â€“ he leaped on and swatted the large beast away. With a roar he jumped onto the dragon and delivered one furious slash, sending blood flying from the victimized dragon's body.

"Toothless, stop!"

The spurred Hiccup's voice cried out in the background, but Toothless didn't heed. He was lost in what was either protective fury or enraged anguish, even wild fear from seeing a flash of the undead dragons there at his feet. His opponent barely had the strength to fight back and seemed to be screeching in pleading for him to end his assault.

"**ROOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRR!"**

"Toothless, knock it off! You're gonna kill him!"

Hiccup ran to Toothless and yanked at his tail with all his broken body. From his tail to the edge of his wing to a hind leg, no tug anywhere made a difference. Toothless couldn't have noticed that, in his fervent efforts to protect his boy, he was instilling that despised powerlessness in him once more.

The downed dragon made one final push against Toothless' frenzy and kicked back at him with his hind legs. It worked as Toothless was knocked back into Hiccup and both fell to the ground. Dripping with blood, the dragon unsteadily rose and tried to flap its wings. It was clear as it tried to fly away that carrying its weight on such battered appendages was a trial. Hiccup watched breathing heavily as the dragon tried to escape, glad that it managed to survive.

That small sliver of relief was shot down once again with the dragon itself by a large net that came out of nowhere. The beast fell into the water with a large splash, struggling and squirming with what little might it retained.

"Wh-What theâ€¦?"

Hiccup didn't even have time to process what just happened in his head as events unfolded. Quicker than a Night Fury's blast, numerous men dressed in furs and with painted faces leaped out armed with spears and came upon them from behind the rocks. They swung their weapons screeching in triumph racing towards their catch and surrounding Hiccup and Toothless with a circle of steel and wicked grins to boot.

Hiccup could barely even get a gulp down with the point of a spear dangerously close to his throat that an accidental twitch could run it through. The Night Fury, already driven into bloody rage was ready to attack if it had come to that. A Night Fury's legendary speed could easily beat any involuntary reaction no matter the amount of gloating that said otherwise. Until the first person made their move he kept his claws firmly embedded in the ground piercing stray rocks to dust.

"Well, soil my britches, isn't this a treat?" A gruff voice sounded out as a distinct, almost formal man among the barbaric cavalry stepped forward. Black hair slicked back and his furs worn like a king's robe, he looked down at the pair like a god would an insect. "Look here lads, a genuine Night Fury. Don't see one o' those everyday..."

"Heard the rumors about one flittin' around Viking territory a few years back." Another man said.

"Aye, havin its fun with the dimwits, I heard."

"Here we are huntin' Snafflefangs," The leader said pointing to the still-squirming dragon in the net. "Only to come across this lost gem of the dragon world, and a little rider of its own ta boot. Fate is kind to the working man."

"Another one?" One of the trappers whose greedy attention had been fixed solely on Toothless suddenly flickered his gaze up at Hiccup. "Yeh sure the beastie hadn't just pick himself a little snack?" The boy shivered at the unwanted attention, but his curisoutly pricked at the mention of 'another'. What other?

"W-Who are you guys?" Hiccup asked cautiously.

"Heh, don't know dragon trappers when ya see 'em, boy? Best not play daft when you an' yours've gone and toyed with our boys all over."

"This here's s'posed ta be the one what's been pilin' our lads up in Hel? Some Viking boy?" Scoffed a boy from next to the lead trapper. In terms of age he was close to Hiccup, but otherwise looked like a near copy of the trapper, with slicked back hair and a musculature highly developed for one so young. "Well, he's got the brain-dead look down, I'll give 'im that."

Toothless growled irritably while Hiccup let a flash of anger cross his own face. "What was that?"

"Oh, going too fast for you? Try to keep up Viking boy, this is how the smart folk tend to talk." He chuckled arrogantly and poked a finger right onto Hiccup's face below his scar. "Where'd you get that shiner? Stick a torch right in there to see how long you could go without screamin'?"

"_**Wanna see how long it takes before I can get you to scream?"**_ Toothless snarled.

"Don't compare me with those savages."

"'Those' savages!? Ha! Imagine that, a Viking who thinks he's even too good for his own."

"Eret." The lead trapper spoke from behind with a stern look on his face. "That'll be enough lip from you. That's no way to be treatin' broken-down 'n weary travelers like them, is it?"

"But, dad! He's-"

"Besides, we're on a schedule â€“ at least five more shipments of dragons to make today." The man slowly marched forward, his footprints in the beast like the crashing of thunder to the young Eret. He knelt down to his apparent son and kneeled down to meet eye-level with him and stared menacingly. "Or do you want to be the one to tell Drago that his delivery came in late cause you felt need to poke fun at some Viking runt castaway?"

The maelstrom of terror that came equipped with that name alone was not lost on even the young Eret. Sweat came flooding down his face while his eyes widened in fear. He bowed down in submission and gave a heavy gulp before walking away back to his father's side. The whole exchange both intrigued and spooked the watching pair of boy and dragon, the former giving a gulp of his own as he asked the question he wasn't sure he wanted the answer to.

"Wait, who's Drago?"

The surrounding men burst out into cackling laughter, even lowering their weapons down for a brief moment. Even Eret and his father who moments ago were locked in the thought of their master and his terrible wrath joined in. At least Hiccup could say he had been used to being mocked in turn for being curious.

"'Who's Drago,' he asks!"

"Yer lad called it, Eret! Not the sharpest axe in the shed, this one!"

"Either that or them Vikings are too spooked to pass the tale!"

"_**So the sire's and the son's nameâ€¦ are both Eret." **_The Night Fury actually let down his guard a bit at the ridiculous idea. _**"Give me a break."**_

"Really now, the name 'Drago Bludvist' doesn't ring a bell? Master of Dragons? Scourge of the north? Most terrifying warlord the world has ever seen?" The older Eret asked. "You're pullin our legs lad. Not a soul around these parts that doesn't know about Drago or his dragon army."

Hiccup stared at them blankly. "Uh, I'm sorry, must've had a chunk of loony stuck in my ear. Did you say Dragon Army?"

"Dragon Army. That's where we trappers come in â€“ surely you're aware ours is a trade valued by collectors and the like. We hunt the dragons down and ship them off to, clients such as the aforementioned Bludvist. One of our best regulars, you can imagine."

"And whatâ€¦" Hiccup's heart raced. "What does he need something like a Dragon Army for?"

"What does he need it forâ€¦" Eret laughed. "What else do you do with an army? Pillage, destroy, take over the world!"

The idea could not have sounded more horrifying and ludicrous. Dragons were among those rare and majestic kinds of creatures existing that were born with power. Their forms and abilities seemed to be crafted for the express purpose of defying anything and everything that was defined as impossible. And somewhere out there, some warlord, some madman took that to mean he could pave out a path to world domination using an army of the creatures. Prepared to bathe the land and sky in cataclysmic flame and build an empire of arrogance and fear from its ashes.

Why was it, Toothless and no doubt Hiccup wondered, that humans took everything around them as a source of convenience? Why was it that dragons were always seen as the stepping stones to glory and conquest, things that any decent man could live without? But above all, why wasn't there anything they could do to stop it?

"That Night Fury, in factâ€¦" continued the older Eret. "Couldn't think of a more fittin' beastie to lead the charge. Drago'll pay handsomely for this one, I wager."

The said Night Fury's guard returned in surges released as hissing snarls as he looked around for any foolish enough to launch a preemptive strike. His tail curled in protectively around Hiccup and his hide pressed against his boy's arm in reassurance. His heart and adrenaline-pumped muscles fanned his inner flame and the gases were overflowing from his jaws ready to ignite.

Hiccup wrapped his arms around his friend's scaly neck, glaring at the men around. "You're not getting Toothless."

"Ah, well, that's one thing you should really learn about Drago." The older Eret said, and with a snap of his fingers, the men dogpiled them from all directions. The two were pinned down and punched at the first instance of struggled, and felt the rough burn of rope tied suffocatingly tight around them. Bruise after fresh bruise came to litter their faces to coincide with the longtime scars they sported. Hiccup looked up at the two Erets with oceans of vehemence that they returned with sinister smirks.

"He doesn't take no for an answer."

* * *

><p>When the Night Fury next opened his eyes, pulses of pain came alive from all over his body. Rusted iron shackles were placed around his legs, neck and mouth, cold and itchy to the touch and just barely cutting off the air from his lungs. With both of those facts in mind, it was no surprise that breathing was difficult and painful all at once.<p>

The slits of his eyes struggled to adjust to the light that filtered past the metal bars of the covering. From what he could tell, they were in some closed hole surrounded on all sides by stone in a tiny space. Moss practically oozed from the walls and bones littered the ground scattered about in heaps, left to rot for years most likely given the smell of them. The chains that bound him were hooked upon the top of the walls embedded into the rock, like the space itself were dragging him down into this tiny festering hole.

"_**Hiccupâ€¦ Hiccupâ€¦ where are you?"**_

Toothless needed only squint to see his boy trapped right in front of him in much the same way he was. A large shackle was wrapped around his tiny frame, crushing him as much as his own inner despair. Not once did the boy look up or even take notice of his sniffs and purrs, whether they be out of relief for his safety or pity for his pathetic state. From all appearances he had been knocked unconscious.

"Hope you renegades are enjoying your accommodations."

Toothless looked up and all his sorrow turned to fiery rage seeing the younger Eret above giving them a cold smirk of satisfaction. He forced himself to look around, focus anywhere except on the face of that despicable human that dared to insult his friend. That's when he took notice of the numerous spires of wood all around them, with ladders and openings dotting them from all around and bridges interconnecting them in between. It would be no stretch of the imagination to say that this was their stronghold, an assumption supported by the numerous other trappers that walked around the area.

"Granted they're not too comfy but," the young Eret continued snidely, "give it a bit o' time, an' you're sure to think of it as your new home away from home. Really fits you, I'd say, Viking boy â€“ smelly, cold, and none too bright."

"_**How dare youâ€¦ HOW DARE YOU!"**_

The plasma bolts released from his maw nearly exploded inside before he could release each and every one. Eret scrambled away from the edge just in time to dodge the resulting explosions, but was still stung from the cobalt sparks that shot out from the openings. The enraged Night Fury fired again and again, each shot reverberating and blasting out the sounds of his shrieking roars outward.

"_**You dirty, disgusting humans! Fight fair for once in your short miserable lives! Let us out of these shackles right now and I'll give you a REAL challenge!"**_

But despite Toothless' rage, his blasts did little to nothing to the

bars. When the smoke cleared they remained as strong and sturdy as before. Like pebbles against a metal wall, they did little more than create singe marks on the metal.

"Best keep your distance lad." Called Eret's father from behind accompanied by a number of other trappers. "Looks like that dragon's still got a bit o' fight in it."

"Fat lot o' good fight'll do it when we ship it off to Drago!" The young Eret said trying to regain his composure.

"You can't make any such predictions when it comes to a Night Fury. Trust me, catchin' this one was a breeze compared to the others back in the day."

"Please, this one was too easy. Spunk's all any dragon's got to it."

"Ah, but the spunky ones are the ones Drago likes best. All the more enjoyable when he breaks themâ€¦"

Toothless could have broken his own shackles at that moment out of pure indignant anger. Every word the ignorant trappers muttered could only fan the flames of rage within him even harder. The blood in his veins raced and set his innards to burn away, giving his claws the strength to pierce and tear away at the stone beneath his feet.

His boy, who had been battered and bruised from one too many undeserved punishments, had been pushed to a point beyond the limits of the human heart and body. For the sake of this comatose boy who'd dared to challenge the natural state of the world, he had forced himself to become something unbreakable, weathering whatever the world could throw at him, something stronger than the chains binding him or the hands that forced him down. Some unheard voice in his own spirit would not allow him to even bend to one human, no matter how feared he was by his own.

"Got that, ya stupid beastie? Drago's gonna fix you up right good, just you wai-"

An explosion sounding from the wooden watchtower above cut off the older Eret's threat. A spiraling tornado of fire blasted through the smog casting the whole tower into flames. The men quickly jumped out of the way so as to avoid the rain of burning debris crashing down on them. That one stream of fire had instantly set the rigid and controlled base of the trappers into utter chaos with men screaming and blazes roaring without any indication of what might have caused it.

"Keep yer heads, you idiots!" The older Eret shouted. "We got company here!"

From out of the smoke came said company appeared â€“ perhaps the largest dragon Toothless had ever laid eyes upon. A dragon with a massive wingspan and a crown of frills and spines above its eyes. It swooped down and to the young Night Fury's surprise, its two wings suddenly split into four. With two pairs of wings beating, it was a simple matter to it to raise the bars above their hole.

"_**W-Who are you? What's going on?"**_

"_**There is no need to fear. We have come to help."**_ The dragon spoke with such reverence and wisdom, Toothless was almost humbled. If he weren't so confused.

"_**We?"**_

The large dragon turned to his shoulder, and from it rose a distinctly human figure. Yet the painted armor he wore complete with spines and a horned mask with slit eyeholes made him look distinctly dragonesque. He carried a shield and staff, both colored similarly, and a long cape that flowed in tandem with the wind cast by the dragon's wingbeats. Despite the massive motion taken to stay airborne, somehow, this human managed to maintain perfect balance.

The figure swung its staff around in a circle, trapped in complete focus. The way the staff swirled around, emitting a strange unearthly rattling noise, caught Toothless' ears. The call entranced him, drew every bit of his attention on the figure, locked in some manner of summoning.

"Oh no, you don't!" Cried the older Eret charging forward with his short sword drawn. "Not today, dragon lover!"

The mysterious rider barely noticed Eret in the corner of his vision, but was saved from an otherwise disastrous encounter by his steed. With one mighty pulse of his wings, Eret was blown away by a powerful gust. His sword was lost from his hand as he tumbled to the ground. His men met the same fate as they attempted to reach the rider â€“ instantly disarmed before they even made the leap to reach the rider.

The dragon let loose its vortex of flame again, melting a ditch in the ground just before them. Its shielding blast didn't deter the trapper's leader from grabbing a dropped spear and making one more attempt past the wall of heat and sparks towards the rider.

"_**It's time." **_The dragon muttered silently. _**"He comes."**_

Toothless snapped from his hypnotic stupor. _**"What, who?"**_

The ground suddenly began to quake and shiver at the moment with the force of an earthquake. The waters below frothed and quivered, churning faster and faster in a massive eddy that formed smaller whirlpools around. And then, in the middle of the rushing ocean water, _it_ appeared.

For a couple seconds, it appeared as though the ocean had simply exploded, rising into the air as though shot from a geyser, but as the water began to fall the true source of movement was revealed. It was a _dragon_, a dragon the size of a mountain with the pale appearance of snow. A creature so beautiful and majestic to behold that the Night Fury was awed to the point of silence. From its broad head, a mane of spikes erupted like porcupine quills, close to its maw two massive tusks, even larger and grander than its spikes, threatened to cut open the very sky with the smallest of movements. It gazed down with shining blue eyes, staring at everything below its grand form in judgment.

"What is that thing!?" The trappers suddenly looked scared, forced into submission under the kingly giant's all-knowing gaze.

The older Eret gave a wicked smile, staring up at the behemoth with glee. "Look alive boys! His majesty's come out to play."

The rider and dragon quickly swooped down and made their move. With one quick swipe of his staff, the chains on both Hiccup and Toothless were completely shattered, sending them limply crashing to the floor only to be quickly scooped in the claws of the dragon. The four of them took off immediately just as the white behemoth sucked in the cold air from all around.

"LOOK OUT!"

"HERE IT COMES!"

All the air the white dragon gathered was released in a vicious burst of icy gales and crushing gallons of seawater. The only way Toothless could even try to describe the sheer amount of power released at that moment was simply _sheer frozen destruction._ What remained of the wooden structures was torn apart in the ensuring flood attack that was unleashed. And then, as soon as the water came forth, it quickly froze at the peak of its rush, forming gigantic glacial spikes that caught all the wood and stone in midair tumble. The result was a series of frozen towers replacing their manmade predecessors, a natural variant of the structures that once existed.

The last thing Toothless saw of it all was the great white dragon sinking into the ocean once again, leaving behind its mark of icy devastation.

* * *

><p>Okay, I'm really sorry this took so long. I was just trying to get into the groove of writing again. That, and my beta, NinjaRiderWriter, was on vacation for a couple of weeks and was unavailable.

But I'd say this comes as a good indication that the hiatus I need to take from these stories needs to be taken now. I am constantly switching between interests and fandoms and right now, I am not too focused in Httyd. Like I said, I'm running on fumes with these two stories, and I've come to a point where I want to do other things. Of course, by now means does this mean I am giving up on these stories. That will not happen.

I hope that when I do post new stories, I'll receive all the great support I've gotten here. Thank you for your continued interest in my work.

As always, review, favorite, follow. And I hope to be back to these stories soon.

End
file.